

jeevadhara

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

Doing Public Theology in Asia

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Faith from Biblical Perspective

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Faith in Jesus and Its Challenges

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Hermeneutics of Vatican II

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Beyond Christo-centrism Towards Theo-centrism

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Lumen Fidei

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Editorial

The impressive growth of economy, the fast emergence of new political power-centres and vibrant civilizational heritage have all made Asia the new axis mundi – the axis of the world. Asian is not only the focus of global attention; what happens in this continent is viewed as foreshadowing things to come. It would be anomalous that in such a continent Church and theology follow lonely furrows and deploy ways and methods of the past that can no longer fit into the new and unique situation characterizing the continent. What is happening in Asia should be a wake-up call for the Church and for theology.

The infighting within the Churches – especially in our country - bog them down and make them incapable of viewing the larger picture of the Kingdom of God which calls for a theology oriented to the future than centred on the traditions of the past. It is really sad to see so much energy, time and human resources are spent for maintaining the traditions of the Church, and how little of all that is invested for the future. At this juncture of a lopsided development within the Church, the call for public theology is a reminder to turn the attention to the larger issues of the society.

The public influence of the Church in Asia, unfortunately, is fast declining. Before it becomes too late, the Church needs to open up new avenues for a meaningful and engaging presence in the new context of Asia. Theology, on its part, cannot but develop itself in dialogue with the experiences of Asian peoples at all levels and spheres. It is easy then to see the importance of public theology today.

History tells us that ecumenism began with the need for common witness and action in the field of mission. Today, the common social, economic, political and cultural situation faced by the Asian Churches makes it imperative that they come together in mutual sharing, coopera-

tion and in the development of a theology that will respond to the common situation. Hence, the importance of an ecumenical approach to Asian public theology. This issue of *Jeevadhara* reflects the ecumenical character in that both Catholic and Protestant theologians have made contributions, and there seems to be a convergence of concerns regarding public theology. Churches of Asia get divided if they open the Pandora's Box of many inherited theologies that set one confession against the other. While much of the traditional theology can confine the Asian Churches to confessional lines, deriving from the historical divisions of the past in the West, public theology will bring them together in conversation and engage them for a common future.

The issue opens with a presentation by Rowena Robinson who brings a fresh perspective by looking at public theology through the lens of public sociology. In my contribution, after showing some of the major and distinct characteristics Asian theology has come to acquire, I argue that the future of Asian theology lies in the direction of public theology. K. C. Abraham elaborates the nature and implications of public theology with reference to Church, society and academy, and in this context critically views the present-day theological training. Evelyn Montero relates more closely public theology with Asian Churches. In the final article, George Zachariah looks at public theology from the perspective of ethics and politics, and highlights in this context the place of new social movements.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the contributors for the time and attention they have devoted in preparing their article. In preparing the manuscripts, Josephine Packiam and Arokia Mary Anthonidas rendered proficient secretarial assistance, for which I thank them very warmly.

It is hoped that these contributions will serve as incentives for further study and reflection on the issue of doing public theology in Asia, which will contribute both to the renewal of the Church and the transformation of Asian societies.

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Asian Public Theology: A Sociological Perspective

Rowena Robinson

The author is professor of sociology at IIT Guwahati. In this contribution after introducing the concept of public sociology, the author traces the development of liberation theology and its critical role, and goes on to show further socio-political developments today which call for a much needed public theology. After some discussion on the concept of public and public sphere, she presents possible roles public theology could play in Asian countries with different modes of governance and in different states in regard to civil society.

Introduction: Public sociology

As a sociologist, I am familiar with the debates surrounding 'public sociology' particularly the arguments put forward so articulately and forcefully by the well-known sociologist Michael Burawoy. Burawoy feels strongly that sociologists need to be involved in the world beyond the academy. As they are part of the world that they study, sociologists must take 'some stance with respect to that world'. Indeed, as he argues, even if they fail to take a stance in the mistaken view that it would compromise their neutrality or objectivity, that failure is itself 'a stance by default'¹

In other words, Burawoy does not believe that sociology can simply serve society in a passive way; it must work to conserve and constitute society along with its existing and potential partners and allies within society. According to him, sociology lives and dies with society and when

¹ Michael, Burawoy. "Public sociologies: Contradictions, dilemmas and possibilities". In *Social Forces* 82, 4, (2004): 1603-1618.

society is under threat, as it is today, particularly but not only from the forces of marketization and commodification, sociology is also under threat and needs to forge connections with society through the development of public sociology.

Burawoy sets out what he considers to be the domain and scope of public sociology.

Public sociology aims to enrich public debate about moral and political issues by infusing them with sociological theory and research. It has to be distinguished from policy, professional, and critical sociologies.²

Thus, public sociology engages in dialogue or conversation with the public on matters of 'political and moral concern'³ but it is different from 'policy' sociology in that it is not focused on finding solutions to specific problems identified by clients. Moreover, it may well interrogate 'the value assumptions of policy sociology'⁴. It is, of course, also different from conventional professional sociology and the voice of its conscience – that is critical sociology. However, it must be said that India has had its own version of 'public sociology' early on. In the post-Independence period, Indian sociologists shared a vision of the discipline in which they saw it as going hand-in-hand with the development of the nation. The discipline should speak to the concerns of the new-born nation and sociologists should serve the government by assisting it to come up with solutions to the problems of the day. This 'nationally-minded' sociology combined some of the features of Burawoy's 'public' and 'policy' sociologies.

Theology and Society:

Development of Liberation Theology

If a 'this-worldly' discipline like sociology finds it hard to agree on its role in the public sphere – for Burawoy and his supporters have many dissenters – how much more difficult must it be for an 'other-worldly' subject like theology to come to terms with its relationship with politics

² Ibid., p. 1603.

³ Ibid., p. 1607.

⁴ Ibid., p.1609.

or social life? The Jesuit sociologist, Heredia⁵ shows that, with the advent of modernity in particular, the church had to contend with what its response should be to the 'social' question. Modernity obligated the church to rethink the relationship between theology and the social world (faith and justice).

According to him, the first response of Catholic and Protestant churches took the form of 'liberal theology' which came to be represented respectively by the efforts of the Second Vatican Council and the World Council of Churches (WCC). Liberal theology was not radical political theology and it functioned very much within the framework of capitalism and the welfare state. Certain forms of a 'social gospel' also permeated the Protestant and Catholic churches from the early 20th century onwards⁶. This response was considered inadequate by Christians in the developing world, for whom it appeared clear that any tackling of the 'social' issue would have to deal with the structural roots of social injustice and inequality. In particular, for those influenced by Marxist ideas, development was perceived to be a problem requiring an analysis of the class structures of society.

This became the basis for 'liberation theology' and it is certainly critical for us to understand the form this theologizing took as well as its relationship with what we are dealing with – public theology. Liberation theology developed first in Latin America. If liberal theology essentially focused on individual freedom, liberation theology was rooted in Marxist social analysis⁷. For one of the most prominent voices within liberation theology, it is possible to distinguish three levels of liberation,

Christ the Savior liberates man from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression. Christ makes man truly free, that is to say, he enables man to live in communion with him; and this is the basis for all human brotherhood.⁸.

⁵ Rudolf, Heredia. "Development as Liberation: An Indian Christian Perspective". In Gurpreet Mahajan and S Jodhka, eds., *Religion, Community and Development Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India*. New Delhi: Routledge. 2010.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, New York: Orbis Books, (1973): p. 37.

For⁹, it is not possible to direct oneself only to purging one's own sinfulness or renewing one's relationship to God without attending to one's relationship with other human beings. In this, the struggle for social justice is crucial. For the Christian, solidarity with the poor is essential otherwise there can be no liberation for all. At the same time, this is not an anti-rich stance for the rich too are considered to be 'alienated' from their true humanity due to their hegemonic position as the class of exploiters. For the Christian in liberation theology, therefore, there must not only be an 'option for the poor' but 'action for the poor' on the basis of this Marxian analytic perspective. As it goes on to say:

The theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of the faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society; this theology must be verified by the practice of that commitment, by active, effective participation in the struggle which the exploited social classes have undertaken against their oppressors.¹⁰

It is true that after its initiation in Latin America, liberation theology influenced both Catholic and Protestant churches, to some extent, particularly in Asia to shift away from a perspective based on 'charity' to one which gave centrality to social justice and human rights. As Heredia¹¹ points out, in India, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) affirmed the 'right to development' and began to call for the empowerment of dalits and tribals. The Protestant Church of North India (CNI) began to shift from a perspective of social service to one of empowerment through a rights-based approach, while the Church of South India (CSI), which has a predominantly dalit membership, made from its early constitution onwards a commitment to dalits and this began to be expressed from the 1980s onwards in efforts to articulate a dalit theology.

After liberation theology

Through the 1970s and 1980s, liberation theology continued to have a strong influence, including the ecumenical movement in the churches.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 307.

¹¹ Cf. Rudolf, C. Heredia, *Op.cit.*

Though the liberation theology movement is still alive today and remains very relevant particularly in the context of the concerns of Asia and India, it has to some extent lost the momentum of earlier decades. It has been suggested, certainly, that the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe and the spread of capitalism across the globe has contributed to crisis in Marxist critical perspectives. Further, the spread of and struggle for political democracy in different parts of the world in recent decades has created the space for more thinking with regard to the domain of the 'public', an element critical to the making of a public theology.

It is possible for us to consider the subject of theology somewhat along the lines that Burawoy constructs the discipline of sociology. Certainly, if we do so we can think of liberation theology as combining – with respect to conventional theology – some of the aspects that Burawoy attributes to 'critical' as well as 'policy' sociologies. Because liberation theology is 'critical' it challenges the foundational premises of conventional theological thinking. Indeed, within the Catholic church, liberation theology is still perceived as threatening and its radicality is viewed as a 'crisis' which offers a new interpretation of Christianity and a total picture of Christian reality which the church must oppose and negate.¹²

Liberation theology may also be said to have something of a policy or perhaps we could say 'advocacy' perspective in that in local situations it attempts to struggle against concrete realities and find '*praxical*' solutions to specific concerns of injustice or inequality. As such, however, it has been critiqued – as have other theologies such as Black theology or feminist theology – for taking on a more particularistic bent. Public theology is the structural equivalent of public sociology in terms of the relationship it bears to its conventional and/or professional sibling. It is usually understood as the reflection on public issues in the light of theological convictions. Employing the discipline of theology, it invokes a way of practicing theology that contributes to productive and enriching dialogue with those outside of the congregation or seminary, and works

¹² Cardinal Ratzinger, as viewed on 16 August 2011, <http://www.christendomawake.org/pages/ratzinger/liberationtheol.htm>

together with these individuals or groups for, as Le Bruyns refers to it, the 'common good'¹³.

It is further, clear, that public theology envisions for itself less the role of advocacy than that of creating 'better intelligence'; in other words, an informed society. For its realization and relevance, it must therefore assume the existence of the sphere of the public within which such informed debate can be carried on. According to Clint le Bruyns, the idea of the 'public' in the context of public theology encompasses notions of 'sociality' and relationality'. As such, public theology employs the idea of the 'public' in terms of Jürgen Habermas' notion of 'the public sphere'. In this understanding, the public sphere is a distinctively modern development and it is characterized by what Habermas calls 'communicative action'¹⁴. It is the 'critical' sphere of the exercise of judgment by essentially private individuals. According to Habermas,

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason.¹⁵

The public thus does not involve merely the state: it in fact consists of all participants who engage in rational and participative discussions concerning the issues raised by the administration of the state. It may include agents of the state but is not exclusive to them. Why do I enter so closely into trying to understand the definitional boundaries of the

¹³ Clint, Le Bruyns, as viewed on 16 August 2011, <http://www.ecclesio.com/2011/05/public-theology-on-responsibility-for-the-public-good-%E2%80%93-by-clint-le-bruyns/>

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, (1989): p. 27.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

idea of the ‘public’? I do this because it must be emphasized that ‘public theology’ quite like ‘public sociology’ assumes the existence of a particular framework and context. That is the context of a modern democratic structure within which the state is constituted as an impersonal locus of authority¹⁶. When this happens, a separate domain is carved out – which is the domain of ‘civil society’. Civil society is another hard-to-pin-down term. For Habermas

Civil society is made up of more or less spontaneously created associations, organizations and movements, which find, take up, condense and amplify the resonance of social problems in private life, and pass it on to the political realm or public sphere.¹⁷

For some scholars, ‘civil society’ consists of organizations outside of and independent of the state. For others, it includes only those organizations that are outside both of the state and of the market. Whatever the limits of one’s definition, for our purposes it is clear that both the organizations of civil society must be active in the realm of politics, and also that any notion of public theology must rely on the existence of a strong, active civil society. An effective civil society and a vibrant public sphere are both vital to the making of a public theology.

The place of public theology in Asia

Given the parameters I have sketched out above, there are certain queries that must be addressed when speaking of what role public theology does or can potentially play in the context of Asia. Asian countries are plural, historically and culturally rich and multi-religious. Some countries are democratic, but democracy and secularism are young in Asia and still in the process of developing and being worked out. Indeed, some countries are not yet or only imperfectly democratic. In such circumstances, how can public theology carve out its own relevance?

It is probably true to suggest that in the spaces and niches within Asia where the institutional frameworks for democracy and a functional

¹⁶ See. Craig Calhoun, ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Boston:MIT Press, (1993): p. 8.

¹⁷ Jürgen, Habermas. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democrac ... op.cit.* p. 367.

public sphere are extremely weak or poorly constituted or even non-existent such as perhaps Burma or Tibet, theologians will continue to find the activist or advocacy model of liberation theology both relevant and inspirational for their struggles on behalf of the oppressed and the voiceless. On the other hand, in countries that have reasonably well-developed democratic structures, a widening public sphere and a strong and independent media, such as India, public theology can play a much more convincing role and can both enlighten and learn from civil society.

In the in-between, there will be societies that have laid the ground for or developed at least the scaffold of democratic institutions. Such societies may be working slowly towards a relatively open civil-society model. Perhaps one could include in such a category countries coming out of military rule or working to separate political and military institutions. In such societies, I do perceive a role for public theology, in contributing to the strengthening of civil society institutions and building participative and inclusive communities of debate and discussion.

Conclusion: What can public theology do in Asia?

It is clear that from all the definitions, that public theology is understood as advising rather than advocating for society or any section of it. In so far as this is the case, it must rely on and work with other secular and religious institutions of civil society and seek to engage with them in a critical understanding of social and political issues in the light of its own spiritual insights into what constitutes the 'good society'. At the same time, there is no reason to limit ourselves to the perception that public theology emerges only from the church. In the plural religious contexts of Asian societies, it is certainly true that Christian theology will learn from other religious traditions and use these to reflect on itself, but that alone is not what I refer to here. One must look for, reflect on and relate to other religious theologies in a dialogue that is not merely framed as 'Christianity in an inter-religious context' but as Christian theology in an inter-theological conversation.

As such, there is much labor for public theology in Asian societies: the work of justice; of decreasing profound economic and social inequalities and lessening social, political and religious conflict. The question has been raised of how 'equal' the debates of the public sphere

can be, when deep inequalities prevent large sections of the people – women, Dalits, tribals, religious, ethnic or sexual minorities – from having a voice on that terrain? It must hence be the effort of public theology to expand the sphere of public debate and to enable – really and discursively – the participation of marginalized sections. At the same time, nothing can be more destructive to the public sphere if it seeks to take over the work of the state or trample on its institutional and Constitutional framework. Certainly, emotions run high in areas of society outside the state. As Dr. Wilfred¹⁸ suggests, the notion of the ‘public’ finds it difficult to accommodate elements that go beyond ‘reason’ and enter into the space of the ‘non-rational’ or of ‘pure affect’.

While certainly the public sphere must be made more sensitive to modes of thinking that lie outside the strict domain of Weberian rationality, it seems to me that the work of public theology is not only to make a space for the ‘non-rational’ within the ‘public’ but to persuade the ‘emotional’ to speak a language that may be communicable to all and that may allow ‘state’ and ‘society’ to converse. Society needs to listen to the anguish of the oppressed, but we should also recall Ambedkar’s discomfort with those who employ unconstitutional methods relying on forms of emotional coercion such as fasts or satyagraha to put pressure on the state. Ambedkar prescience discerned how these forms of protest could result in hero worship that subverts institutional structures and he referred to these as being nothing less than the ‘grammar of anarchy’.

The public sphere is certainly complex and plural; it may also be thought of as being multi-layered. Public theology can certainly do the work not only of creating the space for the voiceless to speak but also of listening to and ‘feeling’ the agony of the deprived or of the victims of violence and injustice. At the same time, their labor will be directed to strengthening and engaging the Constitutional institutions of the state rather than bypassing these. Though a critique of the state is undeniably part of siding with the marginalized, this critique does not try to ignore or diminish the state but tries to make it more responsive. Public theologians

¹⁸ Felix, Wilfred. “Asian Public Theology”, Lecture delivered in Trinity College, Dublin: 20 January, 2011. See also Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology. Critical Issues in Challenging Times*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2011.

will have the challenging task of mediating between the 'subjective' and the 'objective', the 'individual' and the 'state', the 'personal' and the 'institutional' so that these do not talk past each other and instead engage in a continuing and more effective conversation. Without this mediation, 'emotion' and 'reason' may never be able to dialogue.

There are different spheres in which the work of public theology is of relevance in Asia. To mention only one of the important areas, I refer to the threat of Hindu nationalism in India, which requires theologians not so much to close in on themselves, but to join together with civil society organizations (which are run by a wide-range of people of all religious faiths) and minorities to ensure the protection of India's plural culture and its Constitutional commitment to political secularism. In this respect, I believe that the Christian church in particular can play a central role. With the depth of its establishment, it has the potential for creating a strong network of those working for peace and conflict-management. The point here is that the church has resources – institutional, intellectual and so forth – and these should be *part* of its work of public theology. Then, public theology will not be only about conversation, but also about the sharing and building of the social and cultural capital of those with whom theologians are engaged.

To conclude these opening remarks, I wish to say – drawing on something Dr Wilfred¹⁹ - theologians should consider the fields of the social, the political, the cultural and the economic as legitimate and viable 'fields of action'. In my understanding, this should imply that if public theology responds to society, the most important need for Asian societies today is upright and ethical citizens in every walk of life. Corruption has, indeed, corroded public life. In such circumstances, public theologians must also *work* in the world, and not only reflect on it or critique it as members of theological bodies or institutions. In other words, we need also a considerable number of theologians to work from within – to *participate* in the world as trained economists, lawyers, doctors, engineers, professors – and to inform their work, their engagements

¹⁹ Felix, Wilfred. "Asian Public Theology", Lecture delivered in Trinity College, Dublin: 20 January, 2011.

with others and their commitment to their profession with the strong ethical, principled and moral stance that their spiritual training and insights will give them. I have seen the leadership and guidance that such persons can provide within secular institutions or groups and the ways in which they can transform the work of such organizations from within. They lead by *example* as well as by *word* and that might be the most transformative role that they can play in the somewhat floundering societies of Asia today.

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On the Future of Asian Theology: Public Theologizing

Felix Wilfred

The author is a former ICCR Professor of Indian Studies at the University of Dublin, Ireland, on deputation by the Government of India. In the first part of his contribution he highlights some of the distinguishing features Asian theology has come to acquire. He maintains that there is a need to move in a new direction of a deeper interactive dialogue through which theology will seek to respond to the issues and concerns in the public realm, in collaboration with other forces in civil society, and become truly a public theology. By its orientation to the promotion of common good across borders, it will prove to be credible and come across to others as meaningful.

Asian theological reflections have been quite original, and even radical. They have contributed to enliven the life of the Christian communities and also make them open to the realities of the Asian societies, cultures and religious traditions. There has been as well quite a significant impact of Asian theological reflections at the global level. Some of the more open positions regarding the role of other religions, for example, to be found in the Roman documents owe in no small measure to the sustained reflections of Asian theology and of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The force of Asian theology and its innovative character came in the open at the Asian Synod in the many interventions of

the bishops.¹ They reflected a theology rooted in the experience of the Asian continent in dialogue with religions, cultures and the poor of Asia – the triple dialogue announced by FABC.

In the first introductory part of the article I intend to quickly recall the spirit of Asian theological pursuit and some of its main characteristics. While they mark a significant achievement, there is also the need to move forward. The second part of the article then goes to show that this new direction probably has to be the development of an Asian public theology.

Part I: The Spirit of Asian Theology

Reading into the various theological efforts in Asia in the past decades and going through the documents of FABC and of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), I find certain convergence of concerns and shared perceptions. Asian theologizing has certain quality which may not be always explicitly articulated but could be found underlying. This quality of Asian theologizing I wish to present briefly, instead of going into specific issues.

Sense of Divine Mystery

One of the important things Asian theologies imply is the sense of the inexhaustible mystery of God. This has been conveyed differently whether Asia deals with Christology, mission or theology of religions. This sense of the divine mystery inspires Asian theologies not to follow paths of exclusion but of integration and inclusion. This sense of mystery is also behind the spirit of pluralism that characterizes Asian theologies. This pluralism is not simply a reaction to dogmatism, but something born of the realization that the mystery of God is endless and innumerable are the ways in which it comes to expression. Asian theologies celebrate this pluralism and have tried to understand Jesus Christ and Christian faith from this perspective.

¹ Cf. Peter Phan (ed.), *The Asian Synod. Texts and Comments*, Orbis Books, New York, 2002. See also Felix Wilfred, "The Reception of Vatican II in a Multireligious Continent", in *Concilium* 2012/3, pp. 116-121.

The Turn to the Subject in Mission

Asian approach to mission is inspired by the sense of mystery, as well as the importance of the *subject* in mission. The people, their aspirations, their perceptions are important. Mission is not simply a teleologically oriented project. People are not object of mission, but subjects. It is they who in freedom appropriate faith, a process set in particular social, political and cultural processes within their history. Hence it is important to enter into the world and know the story of their experience of faith and understand the expressions they give to it at various levels. There is an effort today to rewrite mission history by foregrounding the subjecthood of the people. Moreover, the realization of the presence of God in peoples, cultures, religious traditions, etc. have contributed to view mission in a unique manner by the Asians. It became very evident during the preparation as well as in the various interventions of bishops during the Asian synod.

Integral Understanding of Salvation and Liberation

Asian theological efforts show more and more an integral understanding of salvation. It means the well being of the whole person without any dichotomy of body and soul, and the welfare of all without distinction of caste, class, religious belonging. Moving towards salvation implies progressive liberation from all that maims, corrodes or negates life in any form. It is a freedom from whatever binds the self as much as the society and the world. Integral salvation and liberation imply that there are no two histories – one history of salvation and the other of the world moving on parallel lines. Some would even oppose one to the other. There is but one single history which all the peoples share across borders and boundaries, testifying to the universality of God's grace and dealings.

Realization of Diversity and Pluralism

Asian theology is infused with the positive affirmation of diversity and spirit of pluralism, not only as a fact but as a value to be fostered. Few continents have such diversity as Asia in its composition of peoples, cultures, traditions and the variety of gifts of nature. The traditional recognition of pluralism and value of a

life of harmony resist trends of uniformity and homogenization. There is no attempt to streamline all this diversity into one common point of unity. There is a mystical feeling that all the differences and plurality we experience meet somewhere and are somehow interconnected, though we are not able to identify the bonds that bind them together. Asian theologies have cultivated this spirit of millennial diversity and pluralism of the continent. It is this which also inspires Asian theology to recognize the infinite faces of the divine mystery.

Pluralism derives also from the fact that human beings are subjects and their perception of reality and their judgments are shaped by their differing world-views experiences, diverse contexts, histories etc. This realization has led Asian theologies to view the diversity of perspectives not as a hindrance but as a great enrichment to the life of faith.

There is today a feeling of threat whenever pluralism is talked about. It derives from a false conflation of pluralism with relativism. FABC has clearly distinguished the two.

A pluralism which claims that all points of view of reality are of equal value surely ends up in relativism. When a point of view lacks a common reference to reality, it amounts to the mere opinion of the subject who holds that opinion. When each and every such point of view that is cut off from a common reference to reality is assigned an equal value, then it amounts to relativism. In other words, relativism holds that there are many truths which vary according to the subjects who hold different opinions of reality...The affirmation of plurality rests on the human search for an underlying unity that enables us to understand reality better. Many Asian philosophies and theologies have shown the unity and harmony behind pluralism.²

² Office of Theological Concerns of FABC, Document on "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology" 1.1. For the text see, Vimal Tirimanna (ed.), *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil. Collection of TAC and OTC Documents (1987-2007)*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2007, pp. 258 – 259.

Partnership in Salvation and Liberation

If all the people in their diversity of cultures, traditions and religious paths participate in the single salvation, they become partners in salvation and liberation. People of different religious traditions converge to experience and bear witness to the grace of God, and God's salvation. They engage themselves in bringing about ever greater freedom to the human family and for the protection and flourishing of nature and all of God's creation. Religious traditions are not opposed to each other but are partners in the project of God's salvation and liberation. This is also true of the many secular movements at work among Asian peoples.

Practicing of a Different Theological Methodology

Theology is not simply a learning of faith-propositions or interpretations of the same. Conscious of this fact, Asian theology follows a method of dialogue and mutuality. Its methodology is not aimed at simply communicating the truths of faith but dialoguing with the larger world. Asian theological orientation is not marked by any sense of closure and easily attained certainties, but rather is imbued with the spirit of a movement. The images of journey, pilgrimage could be more aptly characterize Asian theologizing than images of frames and architectures. In fact, Asian theologizing has broken the conventional frames and architectures as it moves into new avenues of reflection and travels on untrodden paths.

Such being the nature and orientation of Asian theology, it has called for also a significant transformation in theological methodology. This methodology can be characterized as dialogical and open-ended, experiential and transformation-oriented. The integral character of Asian theologizing has come out also in the fact that it does not rely simply on reason. Reason is not the sole instrument. Theology involves other faculties and dimensions of human life. The sources of this Asian theologizing includes the religious traditions of the neighbours of other faiths, the riches of cultures as well as the new forces at work in the life of the Asian peoples. These realities of the context, as rightly pointed out by the document of the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) of FABC,

form part of the resources of theology along with Scripture and tradition.³ Asian theologians have been using these resources in their theological endeavours, and this has made a difference and has given a distinctive character to their theologizing. OTC sums up the Asian methodology when it states:

The Asian way of doing theology is historically rooted and concrete, a method in which we learn to face conflicts and brokenness, a method we value as one of liberative integration, inter-relatedness and wholeness, a method that emphasizes symbolic approaches and expressions, and is marked by a preference for those at the periphery and “outside the Gate” (Heb. 13:3).⁴

Part II: Moving in a New Direction

Developing an Asian Public Theology

In spite of the innovative character of Asian theology, it is a fact that theological reflections have remained mostly internal to the Church and its pastoral needs. I am not saying that the concerns of the world and society are absent. But the point is that these are treated as realms or fields for the application of faith and theology. It has been more a theology in service of public life. The understanding of the nature of theology is basically the same, while the applications differ.

Public theology represents a new genre in theology, so to say. It affects the understanding of theology itself and the way it is pursued. In the context of multireligious and multicultural societies with fast transformation in the field of culture, economy, politics, etc., theology needs to interrogate itself regarding its responsibilities to the larger world. Traditional theology tends to cut everything - the world, society and culture - to its size, reminding us of the Procrustean bed! Asian public theological reflection needs to be

³ Cf. Vimal Tirimanna (ed.), *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil... op.cit.*

⁴ *Op.cit.* p. 343.

open-ended and should begin from the world.⁵ It will endeavour to respond with others to the question and issues thrown up from the life-situation of the people and societies. Such a theology can be characterized as public theology which needs to be promoted increasingly. At the root of this theology is the conviction that the greatest challenge to Christian faith today is to interpret and practice the Kingdom of God in the world.

To understand more closely what is meant by public theology, it is better to see what it is not, and how it distinguishes itself from other related forms of theologies. First of all, we need to draw a distinction between *theology for public life* and *public theology*. The former speaks about faith-motives and convictions for involving oneself as a believer in the affairs of the world – politics, economy, culture, violence, war and peace etc. It is a discourse within the Church about the world.

Theology of public life takes as its primary audience, Christian believers unsure of the religious fruitfulness of civic engagement; and it argues to them that they can become better Christians, and their churches better Christian communities, through understanding and participating in public life as an ascetical process of spiritual formation.⁶

From a methodological point of view, in theology for public life, theology is already made and then applied to public life. Though it talks about issues in the world outside the boundaries of the Church, yet it is a discourse meant for consumption within the Church. On the other hand, in public theology, the concrete life-situation and the questions emanating from it are taken seriously, and an effort is made to respond to them in faith – a faith that understands itself in relation with others and not as a private matter.

⁵ This project could benefit by the approach of public sociology, cf. Dan Clawson et al., (eds), *Public Sociology*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2007. See also the contribution of Rowena Robinson in this issue of *Jeevadhara*.

⁶ Charles Mathews, *A Theology of Public Life*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007.

It is a theology strongly based on God's creation and on the Kingdom of God which have no boundaries. Besides, in public theology we try to create a discourse and language which is understandable for others, and therefore can be shared with them. This new language breaks forth when we hold aloft the truth of creation and the great vision of the Kingdom of God.

How come that, even though theology speaks about the world, history and various issues affecting the society, yet it remains a discourse within the Church? Why does this isolation happen? It could be explained in great part by the fact of the strong clericalization theology suffers from. Theology is not only pursued by clerics, but is also mostly oriented to the training and education of the clerics. Hence it looks to me that along with the vision of the Kingdom of God, there need to take place a process of de-clericalization so that theology be freed to see and identify the presence and action of God in the society, world and history. Then theology will not speak about these realities within the clerical or clerically-conditioned milieu, but will become really a discourse about God in relationship to the world with a language the world understands and grasps as something relevant and meaningful.

Public theology is related to but different from *liberation theology*. This latter theology broke the privatization of religion and made its way to the public realm. The motivation for praxis of liberation came from Christian roots, and the methodology and tools of analysis were by and large Marxian in character. Public theology incorporates the concerns of liberation theology but its approach is much wider and its premises lie in the kind of relationship of religion to common good. Some comrades may be skeptical of public theology, and wonder whether it is an attempt to hijack liberation theology, and even a conspiracy of capitalism! The point we need to remember here is that liberation is the goal to which God's Word is beckoning us. Moving towards that goal calls for continuous rethinking of our analysis of the society and the tools we use to uncover oppression and bondage. In today's world of globalization we live in a much more complex society than was the case with the feudal society or industrial society of the past. The manifold forms

of oppression today may not be adequately accounted for by a social analysis in terms of labour-capital conflict. Think of the issues of women, environment, ethnic minorities, immigrants, etc. Consequently, the analysis of the past requires a thorough revision in present-day circumstances of globalization. Public theology will explore new methods to assess the nature of oppression with regard to specific issues and questions, and seek a multipronged approach to overcome them.

Public theology is also different from a theology relating to public life pursued by *Protestant neo-orthodoxy*, as for example, by John Milbank, Max Stackhaus and others.⁷ Here we have a theology of Barthian inspiration, rather than a contextual theology bearing upon culture and society. This theology concerns itself with public life so as to make it conform to transcendental values, to the Kingdom of God, to God, who is “totally the other” and who challenges and judges the world.⁸ It rests on the assumption that instead of God’s Word coming in encounter with the world, it is the world which needs to conform to God’s Word.

Public theology refers to a theology that focuses on questions and issues that are public in nature and touches everyone across borders. In the process, it frees itself from doctrinaire moorings that have no or little bearing on the shared life and history with others in a society or polity. Since public theology needs to be done differently depending on the concrete situation, it cannot but be *contextual*. Public theology culls out from tradition and sacred sources those elements and insights that could contribute in the concrete context to the wellbeing of the people and of nature. This is a theology which has a language that is inherently dialogical and is ready to cooperate with all forces contributing to common good, something we understand when God’s Kingdom becomes the point of reference. The ideal of God’s Kingdom will serve also as the

⁷ See the forthcoming volume, Felix Wilfred – Daniel Pilario – Erik Borgmann (eds.), *Orthodoxy in Postmodern Times (Concilium 2013/5)*.

⁸ Cf. John Milbank – Catherine Pickstock – Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy*, London, 1999.

point of reference to distinguish a good theology from a mediocre one. Public theology firmly based on this ideal will serve to prune dominant theologies, and convert them to the core of faith and what is most important.

Public theology is concerned about the world, the history and what pertains all. As such, it calls for some basic reflections. Since it is a theology through and through in dialogue with the world and history, we are led to the fundamental question of how to relate religion and the public realm. Public theology cannot escape this issue. As I noted earlier, to create a form of theology and a theological language which others can understand and perceive as relevant and meaningful, we need to clear the ground of this relationship of religion to society and public life. In other forms of theology, such a question may not figure at all, or only marginally. Here in public theology it becomes a crucial issue. Even more, effective construction of public theology – whether in the East or West – will depend on how this question of religion and public life is broached. We shall begin from the case of the West.

The Western Case

In the last couple of decades there has taken place a shift in the perception of the relationship between religion and public life. With the decline of the thesis of secularization and the progressive abandonment of the thesis of religion as private, there have come about new equations between religion and public life. Instead of going into an analysis of how this has taken place, what I intend to do is to examine two most significant voices in the West – Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls - whose position on the relationship of religion to public life has become the core issue in public theology today, and at the same time most vigorously discussed and debated.

From Denial to the Recognition of Public Role for Religions

We could identify three phases in the thinking of Habermas in relation to religion. a) Suppression of religion through communicative reason b) co-existence of religion and reason c) cooperation of both for upholding the gains of modernity. The new turn to the third phase can be discerned in his works since

2001: *The Future of Human Nature, On Faith and Knowledge, Between Naturalism and Religion*. In the third phase of his thinking, Habermas shows his openness to the contribution of religion to the public sphere, challenging the claims of a narrow secularity. He notes:

[S]ecularized citizens may neither fundamentally deny that religious convictions may be true nor reject the right of their devout fellow citizens to couch their contributions to public discussions in religious language.⁹

By way of example, I may adduce here how Habermas shows the importance of Christian doctrine of creation for the strengthening of human dignity and rights. He also sees its importance in addressing biomedical technological issues such as the genetic enhancement. Theological beliefs could throw light on this intricate question and contribute to the present and future wellbeing of humanity.

The Question of “Comprehensive Doctrines”

John Rawls speaks of “*comprehensive doctrines*” and “*overlapping consensus*”.¹⁰ By comprehensive doctrines he means articulated systems of thought or explanations that claim to give a full-range of ultimate explanation of the world, nature, society, bearing upon their origin, value, their future, etc. And this is done by philosophy, religion, moral beliefs etc. In simple terms, comprehensive doctrine means a theory of everything. Religions are habituated to present such a theory of everything – about God, humans, the world and so on. These comprehensive doctrines shape the way we look at the world, others and ourselves.

To be able to understand Rawls’s political theory and his conception of the role of religion in relation to public life, we need to grasp how he transforms Kant’s ideal of moral autonomy (*Critique*

⁹ As quoted in Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas and Theology*, T&T Clark, London, 2011, p. 137; see also William Outhwaite, *Habermas*, Polity, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 157 ff.

¹⁰ Cf. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993.

of *Practical Reason*), in an inter-subjective manner. Here is a question of abiding by those laws and arrangements that find acceptance among all concerned in a polity on the basis of their public use of reason. Moral autonomy is not simply a matter of freedom from coercion; it has a necessary reference to the other and to the public. This moral autonomy is linked to political autonomy. A religious group is politically autonomous not simply when it is free from any coercion with regard to the profession and practice of its beliefs, but when it is able to abide by what the common good requires and what finds acceptance among all concerned in a particular society. In this sense, religious freedom today needs to be defined not in isolation from the other, but in relation to the other and to what concerns the general good of all concerned.

Religion and Public Reason

In the context of the discussion on public theology, a question of paramount importance is the relationship of religion to public reason.¹¹ Here is an issue that allows a wide interpretation but also raises many intricate questions. Contribution to public reason means that religious traditions do not get bogged down by their internal convictions and belief-systems but raise their heads above and hold before their eyes the general interest of the people. It would also involve a kind of translation into secular language of those beliefs that have public significance. The beliefs and convictions held by religious groups require to be supported by public reason, if they are to have any role in public life. The creation narrative of the Bible, for example, can support the equality of woman which is a secular issue in the polity. The same creation story can be deployed to support the cause of human rights. According to Christian belief, human beings are endowed with dignity since they have been created in the image of God. The question then is, should religions be stripped off their beliefs to reach a common ground of neutrality where they could enter into conversation with other similar religious

¹¹ Cf. John Rawls, *The Law of the Peoples Revisited*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2001, pp. 129-180 ("The Idea of Public Reason Revisited").

groups. Don't we lose, in this way, the richness the religious beliefs, myths and symbols contain. Why not the religions carry these roots with them and enter into conversation with others, and thus through a mutuality that touches deeper chords reach consensus and understanding? This is a point which some Western theologians like Linda Hoggen and Nigel Biggar contends, when responding to the position of Rawls and Habermas in relation to public reason or overlapping consensus. Linda Hogan notes, for example: "[A] fundamental flaw in the idea of public reason lies in the manner in which it requires the speaker and listener to believe both the self and the other to be, or to act as though he or she is *rootless*".¹²

The Normative and the Factual

The positions of Rawls and Habermas are at the level of the normative, and are abstracted from concrete context. They follow a procedural reasoning in determining the relationship of religion and public sphere. But the factual reality does not correspond to this theorizing. As a matter of fact, in many European countries, there are the so-called established religions. The clearest example is that of U.K. There, the bishops form part of the House of Lords. Similarly in the Scandinavian countries Lutheranism is the established religion. In these cases as well as in Germany, Belgium and Holland what we find is a kind of accommodation of religions and its continuing role in the public sphere. It is expressed in different forms, such as state-funding for educational institutions managed by Catholics, Protestants, Calvinists, etc., and collection of tax for the Church by the state.¹³

Situation in Asia

We do not want to begin the discussion from a normative and procedural plane, but rather start from the empirical situation of differences in the relationship of religion to public life, as it obtains

¹² Nigel Biggar – Linda Hogan (eds), *Religious Voices in Public Places*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 223.

¹³ Cf. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994.

in Asia. Looking at the empirical reality, we could identify three basic types in regard to the relationship of religion to the public sphere.

1. *Religion Controlled by Centralizing State Authority*

This is the model we could identify in the so-called “socialist countries” (China, Vietnam, Myanmar, North Korea etc.). While religions are allowed freedom for worship and for carrying out certain limited activities, they are strictly controlled, so that they do not become any threat to the centralized authority. Such a situation allows little room for religions to play any effective role for common good and welfare of the whole society, going beyond their religious confines.

In the case of China, we need to refer to the cultural revolution of Mao Zedong. One of the ideological components of this revolution is the belief that religions are counter-revolutionary forces, and against national goals.¹⁴ Along with the bourgeoisie, religions also need to be suppressed for the growth of the country, so it was argued. The ideology of Cultural Revolution viewed religion as an enemy to be fought against. Senseless destruction of religious places of worship and symbols followed. The reforms of 1978 in that country allowed, indeed, some space for the existence of religions, but under the watchful eyes of the state authorities. The vicissitudes in the relationship of the Chinese state with Vatican illustrates the various shifts in the position of the state.¹⁵

Zhibin Xie who has researched on the public role of religion in China enumerates three important reasons for greater role of religion in public life, in the future.¹⁶ First of all, there is the traditional religious character of Chinese societies which is to be seen today

¹⁴ In the case of Christianity, it was viewed also as a tool of imperialism and as an ally of the nationalist Kuomintang - an alliance to fight against atheistic communism.

¹⁵ Cf. Eric O. Hanson, *Catholic Politics in China and Korea*, Orbis Books, New York, 1980.

¹⁶ Zhibin Xie, *Religious Diversity and Public Religion in China*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Burlington, 2006, p. 2.

also in the revival of religion in that country. Secondly, religious groups show increasing interest in participation in public life, which also involves dissent and protest. Thirdly, according to Zhibin Xie, with greater democratization in Chinese political life, there will be room for the voices of different religious groups to be heard. The view of this author may sound optimistic. What is important to note is that even in a centralized Asian country like China, the prospects of religion playing public role has become increasingly greater.¹⁷ This calls for a theology of public life attuned to this new situation. The historically inherited models from the West may not respond to the unique nature of the relationship of religion and public life in China.

Christians in China and other countries with centralized rule are in a dilemma, of having to contribute to the common good and public life and at the same time not conforming uncritically to the state and its policies. It is from this situation that we need to think of Christianity vis-a-vis the public sphere. It is very complex. For some Christian groups, especially from among the Protestant Churches, things seem to be rather simple: Religion contributes to public life by aligning with the state and its programmes, and one speaks about “common ground” of national goals where state and Church converge.¹⁸ Public role of religion here ends up in endorsing and

¹⁷ A few years ago, there took place a conference in Singapore precisely on the issue of the role of religion in public life. The unique character of this conference is that some high-level state authorities and representatives of state institutions like the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences participated. The speeches and papers presented reflect clearly the state- recognition of a positive role for religions, and this is defined as contribution to the harmony of the society. “Harmony of the society” is often an euphemism to say that religions should not act in a manner that upsets the system, the ways of the state. The papers of this conference are collected and published as a volume: Michael Nai-chu Poon (ed.), *Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Social Engagement in East Asia Today*, Atf Press, Singapore, 2007.

¹⁸ Cf. Philip Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground. Protestant Christianity, and Three-Self Movement and China's United Front*, Orbis Books, New York, 1988; cf. also Jason Kindoop – Carol Lee Hamrin (eds), *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*, Brooking Institution Press, Washington, 2004.

promoting uncritically the programmes of the state and the goals of the society it defines. We see then how urgent and important is a reflection on public theology in such contexts.

2. Established Religions

We have in Asia also situations in which religions openly determine politics and public life. There are many variants to this model. Heavy determination of politics and public life by Islam can be seen in Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh etc., and somewhat tenuous intervention of Buddhism in politics and public life in Thailand. In these countries, one could hardly separate majority religion from public life. On the contrary, in many respects it defines public life. Sri Lanka has not made Buddhism the state religion, but the constitution gives it "foremost place". In some of these countries with established religion, like in Pakistan, certain public offices cannot be held by any person other than a Muslim. The state support and preferential treatment of a particular religion conditions the scope for other minority religious groups. Often it is the case that the role in public life is reserved to the established religion, and other religious minorities are tolerated in the practice of their religion, but may not claim any intervention in the public sphere.

3. Principled Distance

In this model, the secular is understood as non-privileging of any one religion by the state. Religions are allowed the freedom of worship and the freedom to propagate and be engaged in social and developmental activities, without prejudice to public order, morality and hygiene. We have such a model for example in India, Philippines, South Korea, etc. This model allows in theory the possibility of religions coming together and jointly contributing to the promotion of common good. But in reality this does not seem to happen. For, religions and religious bodies are often in conflict with each other to secure greater power and privileges for their own groups. Therefore, there is endless discussion and debate on secularism, as for example in India.

All the three models and the underlying situations we have seen lead us to the conclusion that we in Asia urgently need a public theology in new terms, in fresh and unique contexts.

Asian Debate on Religion in Public Life

Unlike in the West, there has been relatively little debate in Asia on religion in relation to public life in its various aspects and dimensions. The discussion has been almost exclusively focused on religious freedom and the understanding of secularism. This is clearly the case of India. Some intellectuals like Ashis Nandy, T.N. Madan debate this often in a polemical manner against the Western concept of the secular.¹⁹ They maintain that in India religion has an important role to play. But then, there are but few constructive theories and suggestions coming out from these circles as how and in what manner religion could play a role in public life in a multi-religious society. The discourse in this matter needs to be initiated and advanced. Let me put forward a few thoughts and views in this regard by way of a foreword to Asian public theology.

The Understanding of Public – Cultural Determination

When we speak of public theology in Asia, we need to be also conscious of the way “public” is understood and defined. This has important consequence for the role of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, vis-à-vis the Asian societies. Here is something which distinguishes Asian approach to the understanding of public and public theology. Hence, not only is the history of relationship of religion to state is different from the West, but different also is the way public comes across to peoples of the Asian continent. Everyday experience shows that what the Western cultural world would consider private are blatantly public for Asians, and the reverse is also true. The cultural determination explodes the conventional demarcation between the public and the private. Without going into the details of the cultural determination, we may say that religion in Asia is *both public and private*. In a certain

¹⁹ Cf. For the discussion on their views. See. Rajeev Bhargava (d.), *Secularism and Its Critics*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

sense it is private; in another sense it is public. It is the intermingling and criss-crossing of the two that is something uniquely Asian.

Difference in the Understanding and Approach to Religion

As I noted, public theology presupposes the current debate on the role of religion in the public sphere. The discussions in the West on this question may trigger our reflections, but may not be able to come to terms with the Asian situation. One important reason for this is the fact that the concept of religion in Asian traditions has been quite different from the dominant conception of it in the West. To cite an example, religion is not viewed in Asia as a set of beliefs or doctrines, but as a way of life – a path, a journey. Religion is embedded in the culture and daily life of the people as the folk traditions of Asia manifests. This makes it already extremely difficult to create any “wall of separation” between religion and public life. But the point is that often the Constitutions of States do not reflect this Asian reality of religion, but seem to be attuned to the Western understanding of religion.

Moreover the relationship of religion to state and public life has had a different trajectory in the West which may not be replicated in Asia. This trajectory, to put it summarily, had three stages: the distinction between the Church and the state; separation of the two; and finally marginalization of the Church and religion from public life as of no consequence.

Public theology will go deeper into the relationship of religion and public life in Asian societies, and its contextually different histories. This history is by a large one of *accommodation of religion in public life* as the development of Indian secularism shows. This type of Asian accommodation cannot be fitted into any three stages of the Western trajectory.

Political Justice

In the context of our present discussion, by political justice I mean the rightful participation of various segments of the society with their different conceptions of good life in the construction of the common good. Since religions in a very significant way

determine the outlook on life and values, it is important that religious groups also play a role in contributing to the common good which means that they go beyond the interests of the respective groups. This way of considering breaks the framework of *minority and majority*.

A second related question concerns specifically Christianity and its participation along with other religious groups for the public good. The difficulty with Christianity is that it is viewed as religion “foreign” to Asian societies. So, the question is, should a foreign religion like Christianity be considered on par with other religious traditions and therefore having a share with others in deliberating on public good. This issue gets accentuated where there is an established religion. *Christianity is not viewed as a partner in the deliberation for common good*. The problem then is how Christians and Christian communities bring to bear upon the public life, the values and ideals which they believe are important and necessary for the general welfare of the people. The same attitude and practice of exclusion exists in practice also for Christianity in India in spite of a secular Constitution and the absence of any established religion.

The principles of democratic governance which recognize equal rights to individuals and groups would go against any such exclusion. But then, here historical memory overtakes any theory of equal participation. The alleged connivance of Christianity with the colonial rule makes many citizens skeptical about the participation of Christians and their contributing to the welfare of the nation. There is an undercurrent that a religious group cannot participate in the common good unless it subscribes to the nationalist expectations. This is how a Chinese writer expresses himself on this point:

Chinese Christianity should participate in the cultural enterprise of Chinese nationalism in order to achieve a ‘common outlook’ by abandoning its insistence on being seen as ‘different’.²⁰

But in fact, “foreignness” and being “different” alone does not seem to be sufficient reason for the exclusion of Christianity from

²⁰ Chin Ken Pa, “What is Sino-Christian Theology?”, in *Concilium* 2008/2, p. 91.

being part of a national dialogue on common good. For, the same societies have had no difficulty to accept Western science and technology as contributing to the welfare of the nation. And in the case of China, it is not only science and technology; its ideology of Marxism was a Western import, but then it has been deployed to construct the political framework, ironically, when socialist systems have been abandoned in the West – in its place of origin.

Public Accountability of Religions

Public theology calls for an internal critique within Christianity. It raises a crucial question: What are being discussed as theology in the Churches, how relevant are they to the public? Public theology makes theology answerable to the people, and in this way justifies its interpretation of God's Word for today. When there are conflicts between religions, it is a clear sign that their theologies have failed in their mission. However much they may explain and interpret the truths of religion, when theology does not bear upon public life, it is a failed theology. Such a theology is not only irrelevant, but could be most dangerous. Views maintained at theological level have serious social and political consequences.

For any religion to have significance beyond the pale of its believers, it needs to demonstrate what contribution it could make to the wellbeing of all. Sometimes the claim is made that by the very announcement of its faith, Christianity contributes to humanity. That could be a well-meant statement. But often this is stated as a protective cover against undergoing any influence from the society and the world, as a refusal to learn from the world. What needs to be said is that Christianity cannot limit itself to expounding doctrines and beliefs which have universal scope, but needs to show how those beliefs concretely affect the life together in the public realm and contribute to the common good.

Public Theology and the Strengthening of Democratic Process

Democracy as a value and as a mode of governance is indispensable for sustaining a society in equity with full recognition of every segment and group in the polity. It is the antidote to

exclusion which is the root cause of injustice. The understanding of collective life and community presupposed in democracy (understood as a process and culture) as well as the dignity of human person and human rights it implies, reflect Christian faith as found in the belief in creation and its understanding of human being and human community. Such being the case, public theology could contribute significantly to strengthen the democratic process. This contribution will be at the same time one towards social justice. Unfortunately, we have not reflected on this aspect in Asia. There is a lot to do along these lines.

Widening the Scope of Religious Freedom

This is a presupposition for a meaningful public theology in Asia. Religious freedom has many dimensions. Unfortunately, it is often reduced only to the relationship of a particular religious group to the state. Obviously, this is still a major issue in several parts of Asia. Religious freedom is not to be viewed simply as freedom from the coercion of the state enjoyed by a particular religious group for its activities in conformity with its beliefs and convictions. *Religious freedom needs to contribute to the attainment of public good* through forging relationship with other groups – both religious and secular. Public theology could help in the development of a deeper understanding of religious freedom and its practice.

There are various kinds of restraint on religious freedom. In India, religious freedom, according to the Constitution, is to be exercised without any prejudice to public order, morality and hygiene. But we need to spell out the positive contribution the freedom of religion enjoyed by a religious group needs to make. The freedom of one religious group needs to be related to other religious groups and all of them together point to the attainment of common good. Here is then the *horizontal strengthening of religious freedom* as freedom for something which goes beyond the interests of a particular group. In other words, a religious group has real religious freedom when the space is open for it to be able to freely engage with others in the pursuit of the wellbeing of the entire community. I would say that this wider understanding of religious freedom is a necessary presupposition for public theology.

The wider understanding of religious freedom challenges the control of religion by the state as well as the established religion, or the idea of official religion which can be discriminative and curtail the freedom of other groups, and hence stunting the potential they have for contributing to common good. Public theology in Asia will address the issue of religious freedom as a necessary condition to bring out the contribution of religious groups to the larger community and to common good.

Conclusion

To speak of public theology is to speak of the future of Christianity in Asia in multicultural and multireligious societies in the larger horizon of the Kingdom of God. In these societies there is need to foster communion and build inclusive communities. Theology will help in this project by taking up for its praxis and reflection issues of common interest that affect everyone. This will help theology to be truly catholic in its original sense of comprising all, and it will not have the mark of being a sectarian enterprise limited to the faith-life of the Christian community. Asian Public theology will tell us what it means to live and understand the Kingdom of God in dialogue with the realities and experiences of this continent.

Public theology is a challenge to traditional theological pursuit, which had mostly the Christians and Christian community as its focus. Traditional theology, by its claim to be a science, it was thought, had come to the public realm in the comity of other sciences. Today, when the understanding and approach to science in general has undergone a sea change and when it operates with new epistemological premises, it would be futile to believe that the public character of theology is acquired by proving it to be a science in the traditional understanding.

Today, theology acquires public character because it relates to the reality of public life with peoples across religious borders and boundaries. It starts with experiences that go beyond the Christian communities, and it asks what contribution it could make to sustain and enhance the quality of public life. This way of

pursuing theology could have great repercussion in rethinking its methods and sources.

Public theology will be pursued differently in Asia and in the West which have differing histories of relationship of religion to society and to the public realm. However, dialogue and conversation among public theologies of Asia and the West could be enlightening and mutually beneficial. But we need to be also aware of the fact that there is a certain asymmetry here. Whereas in the West, public theology has been object of reflection since the last few decades, it is only just now that Asian public theology is beginning to emerge. Asian public theology could be stimulated by the Western discussion, and could go deeper into a reflection on the role of religion in general and theology in the multi-religious and plural-cultural societies of Asia.

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Asian Public Theology Its Social Location

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The author was president of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and a former director of SATHRI, the research unit of Serampore College. In this essay, with a lot of clarity and conciseness, he broaches the issue of public theology in the Indian context. Looking through the lens of public theology the three locations of theology – the Church, the society and the academy – he is able to analyze the strength and weakness of Indian theology and theological education. In the last part of his article he gives some pointers for the future of public theology in India, which requires among other things, the cultivation of pluralism. Most insightful is his conclusion on what it means to enter into the world of the other with the analogy of his experiential world of the disabled.

Public Theology has to do with “the public relevance of theology which has at the core of its Christian identity a concern for God’s Kingdom in the public world of human history.” Moltmann adds – “Its subject alone makes Christian theology a *theologia publica*, a public theology. It gets involved in the public affairs of society. It thinks about what is of general concern in the light of hope in Christ for the Kingdom of God. It becomes political in the name of the poor and the marginalised in a given society. Remembrance of the crucified Christ makes it critical towards political religions and idolatries. It thinks critically about the religious and moral values of the societies in which it exists, and presents its reflections as a reasoned position”.¹

¹ Jürgen, Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society*, London: SCM Press, (1999):1.

In other words, dialogic, critical and ecumenical character of Public Theology is assumed. Theology, God talk, by its very nature is a public discourse. God reality embraces all and penetrates into all human reality.

The term Public Theology may be new, but the concerns implied in it have been addressed in Asian / Indian theology for long. In the wake of nationalism, Indian theologians raised critical questions on the theological paradigm that embraced the religio-cultural experiences of people in India. Concepts, doctrines and symbols of other religions, particularly Hinduism, were used freely and critically by Indian theologians to interpret Christian faith. There was a serious search for an Indian face of Christ, dismantling the foreignness of Christianity. Profound was their recognition that the Christ reality was greater than formal Christianity and that Christ was present but unacknowledged in the religions and cultures of people in India.

Notable attempts have also been made by theologians at this time to relate the gospel to socio-political realities of the Indian situation. A profound analysis of Indian revolution from the perspective of the gospel is provided by M.M. Thomas in a number of his writings. According to him, British imperialism, though ruthless and exploitative, has been the bearer of an ambiguous process of humanisation, especially through technology and industry and liberal ideas of freedom and justice. Christ, the promise of new humanity, he argued, should be confessed as the transforming and judging presence of God.

The emergence of organised movement of the dalits, tribals and other marginalised sectors and their determination to do theology drawing on their experience of oppression and hardship as well as their spirituality is a new watershed point in Indian theology. It has posed a serious challenge to the traditional paradigm but more significantly it provides a new way of doing theology – a new paradigm.

Today we have considerable theological reflections on concerns such as dalit and tribal struggle, Women's experience, Ecology, HIV/ AIDS and other 'public' issues. The impact of individualised and other worldly piety and the emphasis on charismatic renewal, of course, influence the Churches at large. Bulk of our theologians, however, boldly generates a language that is different, but there is no meaningful interaction

between these groups. We face a dilemma. Although our theologians write on public issues, their writings seldom reach an audience outside the boundary of the Churches. It has a public character, but 'consumers' are largely church people – at best students in the theological colleges. How to break this isolation? Why this isolation? Is it because of the language in which they are couched is alien to the secular order? In our search for an adequate public theology the following concerns should be raised.

Social Locations

David Tracy, a prominent theologian of USA has identified three distinct but interrelated social locations of a professional theologian: the Society, the Church and the Academy. These social locations exercise certain pressures on the work of a theologian. He makes mention of these locations and shows that theology is a public discourse. He writes,

Each theologian addresses three distinct and related social realities: the wider society, the academy and the church....The reality of a particular social locus will, to be sure, affect the choice of emphasis. The tasks of theology in a seminary, in a church related university, in a pastoral setting, a program for religious education, in a small community, in a secular academy, in an involvement in a particular cultural, political and societal movement- each of these realities and others- will affect the self-understanding of any theologian. Sometimes that influence will affectively determine the theology. More often the social location will provide" elective affinities" for a particular emphasis in theology, including the emphasis on what will count as genuinely theological statement.²

Both these aspects, the publicness of theology and the social location of a theologian, are important for theological construction. We construct theology *as a public discourse; a privatized theology is a misnomer*. There are notable variations in theological construction depending upon the social location from which the theologian functions. In India, most of our theological reflections take place in the institutions and colleges

² David, Tracy, *Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981, 4.

that train clergy of the Church. The first part of this paper takes a look at some of the problems in the area – drawing somewhat exclusively from the Protestant institutions that are related particularly to the Serampore system.

Theology and Church-Ministry

In our system, the social location of the Church receives a special emphasis. It is not surprising, for most of our candidates who do theology are sponsored by Churches and they go back to pastoral ministry after the studies. Theological education is designed for ministerial training. The courses, syllabi, and even the pedagogical methods are selected keeping this in mind. The Serampore system strives hard to listen to the Churches about their needs and periodically revises its curriculum to respond to them. I am not suggesting that there are no problems in this area. In fact, there is a barrage of criticisms from church leaders about the training programme of the Serampore system.

At a consultation in Delhi on the theological education in North India one of the bishops vehemently argued that the Serampore training was not useful for his diocese. He said that he had no use of persons with B.D and M.Th. in the village congregations; he would be content with leaders trained to conduct worship services and pastoral visits. In fact, he even added that his poor congregations could not afford to pay for the graduates. Apart from the “politics” of his statement, there is some truth in his criticism. The Serampore training, by and large, equips the candidates for a pattern of ministry in the urban contexts. The fact that graduate degree is a requirement for B.D eliminates a large section of people who could fit in better in the rural areas. There are B.Th. colleges that admit undergraduates, but they too want to upgrade themselves to B.D. colleges. This again underscores the pressure under which the Serampore system operates. If you make an analysis of the courses, again you will see the urban bias of our BD programme. How to rectify this situation? How do we equip leaders for rural ministry?

The pastoral wisdom does not come through exegetical study or through the technical skills necessary for the pastor. They are certainly essential for theological training, but the spiritual maturity is attained in different ways. The hiatus between theological training and pastoral

ministry should be bridged by a process of spiritual nurturing. A new sense of the vocation rooted and grounded in the freedom and power of the Gospel alone is the source of this.

In today's theological training we seldom provide an opportunity to deepen our faith and the vision embedded in it. It is said rightly, pastoral care means offering your own life experience to your fellow travellers.³

What are we offering to our brothers and sisters in the congregations, as pastors? Has theological education helped us in discovering our faith experiences and sharing them with others? This seems to be the challenge we face with regard to our first theological location, the church.

Integrating Social Insights into Theology

What about the second location, the society? Recently there has been a great deal of awareness about this location. The social location from which theology is learned and taught decisively influences the process of theological education. The emphasis given for Dalit studies, women's studies and other related fields have brought about significant changes in the way we do theology.

One of the ways to do the integration of the insights gained by social location and the main line concerns is by taking seriously the interdisciplinary approach to theological learning. The disciplinary approach is the legacy of the Western academia. We have mindlessly followed it. As someone has said, there is a vested interest that sheltered it. The professorial interest in safeguarding once own department for the sake of jobs or prestige is quite evident. And many of our teachers have been trained in that system, and we too are afraid of deviating from the norm. It is ironic that in the research level we now talk about interdisciplinary approach. To attempt something in that level is not easy, if all along the scholars have learned through disciplinary divisions. We need to start early. The reality, particularly the social reality, is multi-dimensional and a narrow disciplinary approach will not be sufficient to unravel the complexity of it. There is no reason why we should not

3. Henri, Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1991.

introduce a multidisciplinary approach in the BD level. Take for example, the issue of globalization: How do we study it? One may start with collecting some facts from one's experience, with the help of an economist and a social scientist, make an analysis, raise the Biblical and theological perspectives and conclude it with some reflection on concrete action. An issue-centred approach will help us develop an interdisciplinary form of learning.

The Location of Academy

The third location of a theologian is the academy. The Church has secluded itself from it either for theological reasons or for strategic considerations. It is however important for us to realize that William Carey, when he founded the Serampore college, introduced two streams. Theological learning, according to this original vision should consist in an interaction with the secular learning. In his own personal life, he was an avid student of philosophy, literature and sciences. I believe that he has taken the location of academy very seriously. But somehow or other this original vision has not been followed through. We may not fully share the mission perspective of William Carey and his rationale for starting theological education in proximity to secular leaning. But the fact that these two streams exist side by side is significant and I suspect he envisaged an interaction between them even for evangelistic purposes. An organizational link between the two streams is still maintained in the Serampore College. But I doubt whether any serious theological encounter with secular learning is taking place.

We have departments of Christian studies in some of the major universities - Madras and Mysore, for example. The cumulative effect of all these exchanges cannot easily be gauged in a vast country like us. But we have not given any focused attention to a dialogue with secular disciplines. According to the framework of this article, one may say, the academic location of theology has not been taken seriously in India.. Theological construction in India is, by far, a private affair or at best a communal affair. How do we broaden the scope of theologizing and interact with the secular learning? Without getting into the practical and organizational dimensions of the question, I may suggest some broad areas of concerns.

Focus on “common good”

Reflecting on Theology in modern German Universities, Moltmann writes that theological faculties in the universities are expected “to have an eye to the common good of the whole society in its wider ramifications, and not just to look to their own religious communities; for even the particularist religious communities participate in the common good, and contribute to the ‘good life’ of the communityIt is developed in open discourse”. He goes on to add that “the specific contribution of theology cannot be to reiterate secular options. Taking the categories of what is in correspondence and harmony with God and what is in contradiction to him, it has to set the common good in the light of the kingdom of God and his righteousness and justice”.⁴

Translating this into our multi-religious context, one may say that the discourse on common good be centred on the idea of secular which serves as the foundation of our national life. Secular is not understood as anti-religious. In India, thanks to the legacy of Nehru, the secular is open secularism embracing a humanistic vision. It is in this sense that MM Thomas also uses the same term. He repeatedly argued for a non-communal, secular form of involvement of Christians in the national life. A humanistic/secular vision gives different religions and even ideologies a common basis for cooperative action.

Today this secular legacy has been grossly ignored. Fundamentalist forces are making an organized attempt to foist their partisan agenda in the educational field. A theological critique of this, born out of our commitment to the liberative message of the Gospel, is imperative.

Reinforcing Moral and Ethical Values

Theology in interaction with the secular learning process should be able to reinforce the commitment of moral and ethical values. Education in our country is increasingly coming under the influence of market forces. Skill-oriented education is sought after. Computer technology and outsourcing are more lucrative and the best brains are sold in the market. There are no resources or personnel for fundamental research.

⁴ Jürgen, Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society... op. cit.* 256.

The ethos of our universities and institutions of higher education has been drastically changed. What Moltmann says about his context is pertinent for us:

Today what is on the agenda is the defence of scholarly and scientific freedom over against the claims and bids of industry and commerce. In the sphere of applied research there has always been co-operation between universities and the various branches of industry, and this will always be the case if whole sectors of research are not to emigrate from the University altogether. But the sphere of basic research must and can be kept free of exploitative economic interests as well⁵.

Theology should be able to challenge the secular education to maintain its integrity and freedom and not to succumb to exploitative forces.

Holistic Learning and Vibrant Spirituality

An interaction between theology and secular learning is necessary for a vibrant and holistic spirituality. Spurious spiritualities are thriving. When they are brought to the critical scrutiny of academic research, the wholesome elements in them will have greater credibility and strength. At the same time, the superstitious elements will be exposed. A search for authentic spirituality is quite evident in the modern context. The other day there appeared in a local English daily a full page portrait of Matha Amritananda and a long report on how people from different walks of life, politicians, IT company chiefs and others thronging to receive blessings, 'hugs' from her. Secular thinkers and theologians alike should explore this phenomenon and its spirituality. The search should be for a life affirming, holistic spirituality. It is articulated in the Biblical tradition. But it is part of other religious traditions as well. The web of life has to be sustained by spirituality of life

Pluralistic Framework in Indian Theology

A.P. Nirmal had drawn our attention to the fact the dominant theological paradigm in Asia does not seem to take pluralism seriously. It may look strange in a continent which gives paramount importance to pluralism. He argued that pluralism is not just an affirmation that things

⁵ Ibid., 257.

are plural. It is as well an affirmation that things are so rightly; it is an approval that they should continue to be so. Pluralism is not only a fact of life, but also a value to be cherished. This comes as a critique of all expressions of Mono – monism, monoculture, monarchy, etc. Political authoritarianism and monarchical form of governments are justified by the preference for mono. One God, one Church or one Pope - all these are rooted in the mono culture. Globalisation has created mono cultures that exclude all diversity and forges a monolithic system of thought and social structure. Public theology in India should have a pluralistic framework and language.

Subaltern Perspective

Public theology in Asia / India should come with resounding affirmation of its subaltern perspective. The epistemological break in theological paradigm by our commitment to praxis is a sheer achievement. In fact, this perspective should help us build bridges with other disciplines and also develop a critical and ecumenical theology.

Conclusion

I may be permitted to close with a personal confession arising out of my involvement with a marginal group, the disabled.

In the modern world, the *other* who is different from your race, caste or economic grouping is considered either as a threat or an inconvenience. Present civilisation is built with emphasis on privatisation. The capitalist value of privatising one's own space and property and zealously guarding it is at the root of modern development. But the challenge of disability comes in the shape of an intrusion of the other into your private space. In our religious consciousness too we zealously guard our own God and religion in our private space. We do not want other gods and religions to intrude into our space. But the demand of the other comes as a critique of this privatising tendency.

The *other* is often thought to be an object to be conquered or dominated. Underlying all our relationships, be it man / woman; employer / employee; rich / poor is a desire for subjugating the other, especially the weaker partner. Even in a process of benevolent relationship, the stronger wants to fashion the *other* into his/her own image.

We live with children who are profoundly retarded and autistic. They often live in their own world; seldom are they out of it. It is frustrating if we try to “train” them to conform themselves to our world of discourse. They refuse to come out and become part of our world. The only way we can communicate to them is by entering into their world and become one with it. For this we should know the right code. This process requires a mind-set totally different from that of the fundamentalist approach which refuses to take the *other* seriously. The disabled come with a demand that the *other* be taken as they are. In fact, Levinas talks about the *other* as an extension of your own self. This profound view may be taken as integral to a healthy relationship with the disabled and it is totally different from the fundamentalist’s urge for exclusion. To accept the other as he or she is and then build a holistic relationship is essential for evolving a just and participatory community, the foundation of Public theology.

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Asian Churches and Public Theology

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The author is a professor at Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV), Pune, where among other subjects, she teaches also Ecclesiology. In this contribution she shows the relevance of public theology for Asian Churches. This she does by briefly analyzing the socio-political situation in the continent calling for the response and intervention of the Church as a part of the larger civil. The author highlights the scope of public theology for the Asian Churches and some of the questions and concerns they need to grapple with.

1. Introduction

Religion is once again beginning to play a very significant role in public domain. As a corollary, public theology is attracting increased interest in today's global, regional and multi religious context. With heightened awareness of the political and social significance of religion and of the duty of the Church for social involvement, theologians and their discourses are increasingly drawing attention. The need for a thoughtful theological engagement with the major issues of public life has therefore never been greater. To me public theology could attract diverse groups concerned with progress and justice on a same platform for drafting a common social agenda.

Catholic Theology in the post colonial contexts of Asia continued, unfortunately, to be academic, urban and borrowed. It has been exclusively by and for the 'religious', for those destined to lead the Church and to teach in seminaries. The Church's position was expected not to be a left-right (only centre or balanced) stand. For this reason, Catholic theology got disconnected from public

life and civil society, resulting in Church distancing itself from public issues and prophetic mission. Except for the imparting of Western education and promoting charitable, welfare and developmental works, the Church wielded marginal influence on the political, cultural and economic realms of the Asian societies. The new task would be to put fundamental and systematic traditional theologies at the service of public theology that seeks to engage with the economic, political and cultural issues of the day, thus making possible a coherent Christian perspective to bear upon public life and policies.

The term 'public theology', coined by Martin Marty (1981), is a modification of the term 'public religion', originally used in 1749 by Benjamin Franklin. For Martin Marty, the public Church concretely exists in the increasingly interfaith-ecumenically open parts of mainline Protestantism, evangelical Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. When the public Church examines and critiques existing social practices and cultural understandings in the light of its deepest religious insights into justice and the just society, it does public theology. Since the last few decades, we are becoming increasingly aware that the Churches the world over find themselves in varied contexts and are challenged by situations vastly different from each other. Therefore, the public theology required for the Churches in Asia is also different because of the different socio-cultural and political situations. Post-Vatican II theological reflections within the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), support a theology of greater public involvement, but again with a 'balanced' (non-militant) stand.

The focus of the paper is the relevance of Public theology in Asian Churches. We shall not limit our theological investigation to the Christian community alone but also include all people in public life. The paper includes a clarification of certain theological concepts, the scope of public theology in Asian Churches and the major concerns and questions of public life that Asian Churches are challenged to address. Finally, an attempt is made to relate public theology and Asian Churches.

2. Clarification of some terms

2.1. Asian Church or Asian Churches

Theology describes the Church as having a divine origin as well as socio-historical roots. This divine-human assemblage, capable of being objectively and historically accessed, experienced and critiqued, has nevertheless been perceived differently along the centuries. Social contexts and dominant theologies of the time have determined its local self-understanding, and often one aspect - the divine or the human - got emphasized.¹ But the diversity of self-understanding far from denoting disunity, stands as a witness to the fact that the Church by its nature is always open, and therefore can read the signs of the times (LG 1) to make the message of Christ meaningful.

The Church can proclaim the message of Christ only by becoming a human Church with its own local face. Only in becoming local *ekklesia*, the Church can respond to the socio-cultural concerns of the people; an interface of the Gospel and culture can cause vibrant Churches. This ecclesial dimension is also reflected in the statement of the Federation of the Asian Bishops: "The mystery of the Church must be understood in its spiritual reality and in its very concrete 'earthing' within its own milieu."²

Asian countries, although characterized by several common experiences, have distinct socio-cultural contexts with distinct social challenges and concerns. It would therefore be arrogance to boast of possessing the knowledge of all these differences, and inappropriate to club together all the Churches in Asia and speak of 'Asian Church' in singular. With Asia's complex socio-political and historical realities, its diverse mosaic of peoples and languages and bewildering plurality of cultures and religious traditions, the concept of 'Asian Churches' expresses the distinct localness of each Church within the communion of Churches in Asia

¹ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*, London: Burns & Oates, (1950):218.

² "Theses on the Local Church," *FABC Papers* 60, Hong Kong:(1990): 12.

2.2. *Civil Society and Public Theology*

The concerns of civil society are the raw material for public theologian. Civil society is understood as the voice of non-government, non-corporate and non-market groups, that stand up for social rights and try to influence political and economic policies. However, it has been argued that this voice is usually that of the bourgeoisie which does not always represent the rural concerns. Though civil society offers some space for subaltern discourse, it does not easily entertain any transfer of power that matters to the periphery. Felix Wilfred writes, "One relates civil society with the freedom of association, of expression, etc. But the point to note is that such a freedom could co-exist with inequality. This means that we would have left out of the purview of the civil society the concerns of the marginal peoples and groups – the dalits, tribals, the women of the lower castes and classes."³ Bishnu N. Mohapatra goes further and asks, "Are all groups in civil society equally capable of forming associations? What about people who are not in a position to form associations, or networks to ensure that their interests are regarded as legitimate? What happens when the state refuses even to recognize the existence of a particular group of people?"⁴

Fortunately, civil society is beginning to include and take up issues of the silenced and oppressed. The important question and answer for a public theologian is whether the Church or local Churches are part of the civil society, understood in a more inclusive sense of comprising the concerns of the marginalized. In other words does civil society recognize the Church, which claims divine origin and a society above societies, as part of itself? The fact is that very often the voice of the Church does not resonate with issues raised by civil society. In many nation-states Churches support the policies of governments that civil society contest.

³ Felix Wilfred and George Thadathil, (eds). "Christian Community and Civil Society", *Community and Identity Consciousness*, Chennai: Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, (2004): 157-181, 158.

⁴ Rajesh Tandon and Ranjita Mohanty, "A View from the Subalterns – The Pavement Dwellers of Mumbai," *Does Civil Society Matter? Governance in Contemporary India*, Delhi: SAGE, (2003): 293.

3. Scope of Public Theology in the Asian Churches

Public theology, a relatively new discipline, is concerned with how the Christian faith addresses matters in society at large. Christian beliefs and doctrines without public relevance is passé. Public theology assumes that its project is inclusive, namely, relevant for all humanity, not just Christians, an understanding essential in, and derivative from, multi-cultural and religious contexts of Asia. It does not seek to 'convert' but to provide resources for people to make connections between their faith and the practical issues facing society. It is concerned with the well being of all people, irrespective of class, creed, caste or race. It is inclusive theology, not eclectic or relativistic.

Public theology therefore, does not limit its discourse to political matters alone. It is much broader, as it is concerned with a variety of public issues - artistic, cultural, environmental, medical, and technological. In seeking to engage the public structures, Asian public theology points to the larger narrative of God's work in the complex and diverse Asian contexts through God's concern for justice, truth and salvation. Thus, public theology is basically a prophetic and transformative theological reflection of engagement with society. It is prophetic because it seeks to proclaim the Good News where the news is 'not so good', and transformative because it aims at elimination of social stagnation. Public theology also reminds the Asian Churches that while they are essentially local, they are also in communion with the global Church. For, social problems and concerns are common, and require human solidarity. The mission of the Asian Churches too is common - that all may have life and life in its fullness.

Public theology can turn Asian Churches into public Churches, imperative for a rapport with Asian societies. Public theology can challenge faith to become less private in favour of a more personal and social faith. To become public Church would involve not only going out into the market places but also opening the doors of the Church for all persons of social will. This demands that the Asian Churches engage in revisiting and redefining their mission in the

Asian scenario. The reformulation of mission consists in learning to dialogue with the changing times, and in seeking to create conditions for a socially alert Church in Asia. This implies that a socially oriented Church cannot continue to be Church of yesteryears – focusing on its own need and sheep. Public theology enables the Church to understand God and the depths of the *missio Dei* and to reflect on what it means to be Church in the Asian context of plurality of religions, cultures and ethnic groups, and in situations of abysmal poverty and exploitation. Although the Church today is seen by many as just one more truth claim in the midst of plurality of alternative truth claims, all of which are seen as relative, the public role of the Church is incontestable.

4. The Asian Public Life

Public theology without social thinking may be anything but public or liberative. I do not pretend to know the social reality of Asia and of the Asian Churches. However, I am attempting a brief survey of some of the startling realities of the Asian public life. FABC has clearly identified three common elements characterizing the Asian context: plurality of cultures, religions and the poor. Consequently, the three essential tasks of the Asian Churches are inculturation, interreligious dialogue and liberation. It is vital to note that for FABC, which is the voice of the Asian Churches, these tasks are three intertwined dimensions of the Church's one mission of prophetic evangelization. The FABC's seventh plenary assembly puts it concisely:

These issues are not separate topics to be discussed, but aspects of an integrated approach to our Mission of Love and Service. We need to feel and act "integrally". As we face the needs of the 21st century, we do so with Asian hearts, in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters and by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths. Inculturation, dialogue, justice and option for the poor are aspects of whatever we do.⁵

⁵ "A Renewed Church in Asia: Pastoral Directions for a New Decade", *FABC Papers*, 95, Hong Kong:(2000): 8.

It is within this broad framework of the triple tasks of one mission, that I would like to underline some crucial issues plaguing the public life of Asia and which calls for a public theology that could motivate the Asian Christians to respond pro-actively. Threats to and violation of life, very often structural, are increasing both at the global level and in the continent and no aspect of public life – social, economic, political, cultural and religious – is left untouched. The Churches of Asia are challenged today to reflect on their commitment to service of life.

4.1. Economic realities

The economic base in most Asian countries is dismal and in others it is uncertain. A new culture of consumerism and competition has invaded the Asian continent, and these have no regard for ethics and no interest in the future. Lack of political justice has depleted natural resources and increased the miseries of Asians.⁶

In the globalized liberal economy, mass media promotes greed and creates an euphoria to “become rich today.” Such publicity has also paved the way for corruption, bribery and other unethical practices. As a result, no citizen is insulated from corrupt, anti-social, unjust structures,⁷ from commercialization. Liberal economy views everything, including human beings as marketable commodity

Furthermore, the age-old ecological balance that we have enjoyed, thanks to the far-sighted measures of our ancestors, is today sacrificed for short term economic gains. There is the systematic and unbridled destruction of our Asian forests and water resources. The green house effect, pollution and increasing natural calamities are consequences of the destruction of environment and disturbance of harmony with nature. Only serious engagement of prophetic quality can take on this market onslaught. Such being the situation, the world of economy should be an essential part of Asian public theology and its theologizing process.

⁶ According to the latest FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN) reports, one sixth of our world's 6.5 billion populations are hungry and starving, and the majority of them live in our Asian continent.

⁷ “*On Being Human in the Changing Realities of Asia*”, FABC Papers No. 133, 22-23.

4.2. *Political Realities*

Many countries in Asia gained political independence only last century; consequently, many countries are still searching for political stability without which progress will not be possible. Unfortunately, many of Asian economies depend on the West and their political agenda. People, especially the poor, are viewed only as vote-banks to come to power. The overriding greed for power, the false and unrealistic promises made to the poor at election times, the abuse of state-machinery, the cheap blowing up of ethnic, caste and communal issues – these are some of the abominable practices that deprive people of their rights and a dignified life.⁸

Political power is synonymous with upper class or caste or ethnic group that perpetuates itself dynastically and feudalistically. In spite of the power and rights granted by the Constitution to minorities and subaltern groups like the Dalits, political control is still exercised by the tycoons of economic and religious powers. Today the holders of power are the corporates, the landlords, the underworld, the middle class and the upper castes. Subaltern movements are demanding greater share in power. The upper classes and castes feel threatened, and often try to buy over the subalterns wherever possible, and when not successful, use violent means to silence them.⁹ Inclusion of political processes in public theology will give the much needed political dimension to Asian ecclesiology. The Churches in Asia have a crucial role to play in the political life of the nations in order to promote just, participative and democratic governance in the society.

4.3. *Violation of Human Rights and Dignity:*

The Poor, Women, Dalits, Tribals, Youth and Environment

FABC views socio-political and economic liberation as a key priority in the Church's activities in Asia, given the presence of massive and dehumanizing poverty among the Asian peoples. The

⁸ Ibid., 36

⁹ T.K. John, "Christian Commitment to Nation Building," in Anthoniraj Thumma & Alphonse D. Sahayam, (eds). *Christian Commitment to Nation Building*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publication, (2003): 119-178, 152-153.

emphasis on the preferential option for the poor and solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized, especially the migrants and refugees, tribals and dalits, children and women, is a refrain that runs through all the FABC documents.¹⁰ The Asian Synod (1999) has also drawn attention to the protection of life, both human and cosmic, promoting education, preventing marginalization caused by globalization.¹¹

Women are one of the most marginalized groups. They remain excluded from the mainstream life in society, nation and in the Church. They are not merely excluded but remain the most powerless and unrepresented group. The consequence of women's under-representation in politics¹² and in other areas of public life in most of the Asian countries is due to the absence of the feminine mindset in important spheres of life. Moreover, women's rights and dignity, greater participation in decision-making and empowerment have not been adequately addressed. Female migrant workers are exposed to the anxiety of lay-offs and unemployment. Women continue to struggle against sexual exploitation, forced labour, female infanticide, sexual abuse and violence.

To build a nation, we need "a politics for participatory democracy, a politics for restructuring gender relations"¹³ How can a nation develop and prosper when traditional and patriarchal

¹⁰ Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues, Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*, New York: Orbis Books, (2003): 25

¹¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 35 – 41.

¹² The Indian Constitution, for instance, in articles 14-16 provides equal opportunities and equal protection of law to all citizens. No discrimination on grounds of religion, caste, sex or any other is permitted. Article 39 is on equal rights for men and women for an adequate means of livelihood and on equal pay for equal work. The reality, however, is quite the contrary. We have never had more than 8% women representation in parliament, 10% in State Assemblies and 13% in the Council of Ministers in spite of being nearly 50% of the total population. The 33% reservation Bill for women in parliament is still hanging.

¹³ Kumar, Anand.ed. *Nation Building in India: Culture, Power and Society*, New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, (1999): 141.

structures continue to dominate? The development of any nation is not possible without the contribution of women.¹⁴ Addressing these concerns in public theology and evolving a more inclusive Asian public theology will enable the Asian Churches to be voice of 50% of the silenced and marginalized women population.

The Church attributes “special importance to the period of youth as a key stage in the life of every human being”¹⁵. A study in 2002 noted that the “current cohort of youth was the largest ever” in Asia. A sense of community, dynamic courage, interest in politics and idealism characterize the Asian youth today. In fact, ‘internet generation’ could be a collective description for the contemporary generation of Asian youth. The Asian youth are establishing transnational ties and forging new forms of relationships through online networking, blogging, tweeting and the web board. The mobile phone is becoming the most ubiquitous internet platform for Asian youth. Paradoxically, while media and technology promote communication and human solidarity, they also lead to alienation and isolation.¹⁶ With the emergence of the digital age culture, a communication gap is widening between digital age youth and digital native adults.¹⁷ For the Asian Churches to meet the challenges of the digital age and respond to the new questions the youth raise, public theology could be very important, and even indispensable.

In a multi-religious Asia, there is a growing phenomenon of religious fundamentalism, cultural nationalism, terrorism, extremism and violence. They are the sources from which stem violation of human dignity and rights. Some Asian countries that have adopted only one religion as state religion resist pluralistic ethos and even deprive others of the freedom of religious practice, and treat them

¹⁴ Ambrose Pinto, “India: Whose Nation Is It?” in Anthoniraj Thumma & Alphonse D. Sahayam, (eds), op.cit. 5-28, 17.

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici*, 1.

¹⁶ See Benedict XVI, Message, 43rd World Communications Day, 24 May 2009.

¹⁷ Cf. *FABC Papers* No. 133, 16-19. Mass media has created an alternative expert system that competes with traditional authority figures.

as second-class citizens at best. Those other nations claiming to be democratic and secular are becoming increasingly intolerant to diversity, and discriminating against minority religious groups.¹⁸

5. Do the Churches in Asia Raise Their Prophetic Voice in Public Life?

Asian ecclesiology has not come of age or rather has not brought hard questions to bear on itself or has not really accepted the challenges for public engagement. During and after the colonial period of missionary expansion in Asia, the traditional Western theology was planted in Asian soil without breaking the colonial pot. Later efforts were made to accommodate the Western theological concepts into the Asian languages. Asian theology of religions that emerged in the post-conciliar times attempted to study the ways by which God manifests in Asian religious traditions and understand their beliefs and practices. The project of inculturation restricted its interpretation of faith and its mission-involvement to the Christian domain, particularly in the areas of Christian faith and life.¹⁹ It is only with the emergence of Asian liberation theology that Asian Churches were motivated to engage themselves in the socio-political realities. The challenge today is an interfacing of the existing Asian theology of religions and Asian liberation theology with public theology that enable the Asian Churches to commit themselves more prophetically to public causes.

Are the Churches ready to seriously engage themselves in public life? This is a question for the Church leaders and theologians to ponder and answer. We need to also ask whether there are adequate tools and support mechanisms for Christian involvement for social transformation. What concrete steps are taken to empower and enable the marginalized - women, Dalits, Tribals? Are we really building a participatory Church for social change? The Churches in Asia need to begin once again to ask simple but fundamental questions.

¹⁸ cf. *Populorum Progressio* 30, 31; *Centesimus Annus* 52¹⁹ Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology...op.cit.* xvi-xix.

¹⁹ Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology... op.cit.* xvi-xix.

6. Asian Churches and Public Theology

The Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17), which was convened just before the Reformation, affirmed the prevailing understanding of Catholic reform: that humans have to be changed by the Church, and not the Church by humans. Such a classicist mentality presumed that the Church moved through history without being affected by it. However, 450 years later, Vatican II's radical change in perspective explicitly intended "to end the stance of cultural isolation" and enter into a relationship with the world by initiating a new freedom of expression and action within the Church. *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, represents a defining moment in the Catholic understanding of the relationship between the Church and the world. The world is not understood as opposed to God, rather it is perceived as the totality of creation, nature and society, and every type of work "is a prolongation of the work of the creator, a service to their fellowmen and their personal contribution to the fulfillment in history of the divine plan".²⁰

In the post-conciliar times, the Church has further articulated its concern for social transformation for a just and more humane world, departing from Pope Leo XIII's stand in *Rerum Novarum* which was the first major magisterial step taken towards placing the Church on the side of the poor and the working class. Although his option in favour of the poor implied change, he did not want Catholics to join and support the workers in any trade union. Later Pope Pius XI did challenge the capitalist model of society and called upon the Church to be an agent of major socio-political change in society. In the encyclical *Firmissimum*, he even suggested that in extreme situations, resistance could be justified.

In the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967), Paul VI analyses the global scenario, and traces the causes of poverty to the evil effects inherited from colonialism and the present neo-colonial situation. He calls for transformation in structures and for

²⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* 34.

commitment of the official Church to integral development of all peoples, with particular reference to the poor. In *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), Paul VI deals primarily with implementing an equitable order in society, recognizing the need for political solutions to economic problems. The Synodal document "Justice in the World" (*De Iustitia in Mundo*, 1971) further affirms that any action on behalf of justice and of transforming the world is a constitutive dimension of the Church's mission of proclaiming and establishing the reign of God.

The Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) underlines that the task of the Church is to witness and foster liberation from all types of oppression – cultural, religious, economic and political that degrade humans. In *Laborem Exercens* (1981) and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), John Paul II speaks of solidarity as a struggle for justice, rather than a struggle against other people or classes. Solidarity is not to be identified with confrontational struggle though confrontation is not excluded.²¹

The entire corpus of FABC documents deal with the implications and challenges of "being Church in Asia." Certain trends of the social teachings of the Church are evident in these documents, especially in their criticism of those oppressive systems that marginalize the poor.

Today the medium through which the Good News can continue to advance (Acts 12:24) is public life. Jesus' Kingdom mission was carried out on the platform of political society and not from the aisles of the temple. The Churches in Asia are challenged to relive the life of Jesus in public space of human struggles and hopes. The churches will have to develop a relevant Asian public theology through radical participation in the discourses and movements in public life. The question today is how the Church can become a public movement as the ecclesial communities of the apostolic times. Michael Amaladoss responds saying we need "to transform society

²¹ See Dominic Velliath, *The Theological Basis of Christian Commitment to the Nation*, in Anthoniraj Thumma & Alphonse D. Sahayam (eds), *Op.cit.* 75-117.

into a cosmotheandric communion both by being its symbolic and prophetic presence in the world and by actively working for it.”²²

To transform society into a cosmotheandric communion, it is necessary to delineate synthetically the theological framework within which the Churches in Asia are called to commit themselves to public life. The object of Church’s commitment to public life is undoubtedly the Reign of God. However, there are certain problems confronting the Asian Churches today which need to be addressed in Public theology:

- Lack of communion among the Christians is a major counter-witness to the Kingdom values. The number of Churches in one city alone (Syrian Catholic, Latin Catholic, Malankara Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Jacobite, Presbyterian, Lutheran ...), each functioning independent of the other with no communion among them, and Christians divided on the basis of caste, ethnicity, gender are major blocks to effective commitment and contribution to public life.
- The overly institutionalized structure of the Church has kept Christians away from social, civil and political foras where social, civil and political processes are generated, where decisions are taken and where policies are formulated.
- There is a lack of integration of philosophy-theological formation with the socio-cultural and political ethos of the nation.

7. Conclusion

Public theology necessarily involves socio-historical and cultural analyses and continuous awareness of social issues. One of the greatest challenges for academic theology is to bring one branch of theology to bear on the other. The emergence of liberation

²² Michael, Amaladoss. “A New Way of Being Christian in India Today, Theological Reflections,” in Antony Kalliath & Francis Gonsalves (eds), *Church’s Engagement in Civil Society: A New Way of Being Christian in India Today*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, (2009): 143.

theology or public theology, its offshoot, is the acknowledgement that traditional theological methodologies could not respond to modern quests and questions. Although seminaries have included social analysis in their programmes, it leaves much to be desired. Answers are given; simple and relevant questions are not raised. Social analysis is taught once for all, and does not serve as foundation for the rest of theological debate. This may be one reason why the Asian Churches are failing to respond to societies' challenges and burning issues.

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Subaltern Social Movements: The Locus for Re-discovering Christian Social Ethics

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George Zachariah serves Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Chennai, as Professor in the Department of Theology and Ethics and as Dean of Graduate Studies. He leads us into a deeper reflection on the issue of public theology by viewing it from the perspective of the subalterns and their counterpublic sphere, and shows the intimate connection between ethics, knowledge and politics. He highlights the transformation theology and Christian ethics need to undergo today to become really public theology and respond to the concerns of the issues being voiced through new social movements. He also tells us the importance of the agency of the subalterns in the construction of theological and ethical discourses today.

Public theology is a theological movement that is gaining momentum in our times. It affirms the role and presence of theology in the “public”. Asserting religion as a public phenomenon, public theology proposes to reevaluate the “secularization thesis”; it rejects the binary thinking of secular vs sacred.¹ Public theology is polyphony of distinct yet related projects to theologically engage in the public arena. One can identify at least three projects here. The first project is to re-imagine the

¹ See. Gnana Patrick, “Public Theology and Religious Pluralism: Some Preliminary Reflections,” in *Gurukul Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, January, (2011): 41-50. For a detailed discussion on Public Theology from the Asian context see Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology: Critical Concerns in Challenging Times*. Delhi: ISPCK, 2010.

institutionalized church in the public sphere as a public-oriented church. The second attempt is to demonstrate the public character of theological discourse by identifying the common criteria of truth that theology might share with other disciplines or modes of discourse. And finally a search for developing a theological mode of address that can respond to some of the most pertinent issues of our times, which can engage a wider public that transcend religious boundaries.

As public theology emerges in our context as a contemporary mode of theological thinking and discourse, there are discordant voices in our midst, particularly from the margins of our “public” interrogating the politics and epistemology of public theology. They begin with the basic question: Are we trying to rehabilitate a religion and its institutional apparatus which lost their credibility and relevance long back? They further find the adjective “public” problematic:

It is usually contrasted from ‘private or domestic’, with the public seen as the place of males, educated and privileged, while the private or domestic is the place of women, servants and the poor.... (However,) when it comes to homeless poor people *whose homes are in the public arena*, their homes are not private; the home of the homeless poor is the public square; but they are the very ones who have no voice in the public and in western public theologies. The public square is the home of the homeless poor, so they are in diaspora at their home.²

Public sphere and public theology are therefore contested concepts and categories. This article, hence, is an attempt to engage with these concepts critically, informed by the perspectives of the communities at the margins and their social movements, to initiate new discourses on Christian ethical discernment and praxis in our contemporary publics.

Interrogating Public Sphere and Civil Society

The concept of public sphere as a discursive model is an important contribution of Jurgen Habermas.³ Public sphere is the domain in which public opinion can be formed. This domain is conceptually distinct from the state and the market. It is primarily a discursive site and theatre for constructing and circulating discourses that are critical of the state and the market. It is important to note here that Habermas developed the notion of public sphere as part of his theory of New Social Movements.

For Habermas, the New Social Movements of the late 60's (the women's movement, the environmental movement, the anti-war movement and the like) are the source for the public sphere. In his theory of communicative action, Habermas makes a distinction between system and lifeworld, and diagnoses the colonization of the lifeworld by the system as the root cause for the contemporary crisis. System in this model is understood as those administrative areas of modern society coordinated by money and power, and represented by the market and the state. Lifeworld, for Habermas, is the everyday world, the site of symbolic interaction, where we live together and communicate with each other. Habermas's theory of the New Social Movements (NSMs) is based on the shift of conflict between capital and labour to that between system and lifeworld. This bias against the "old" politics of the labor movements is evident in his rejection of the struggles for distribution. The Habermasian concept of public sphere, hence, needs to be understood in the context of his wider project of the colonization of the lifeworld and the New Social Movements.

Habermas presents the public sphere as a discursive site which is conceptually distinct from the state and the market. The public sphere is an arena where the citizens engage in discursive interactions in order to produce and circulate new discourses to bring about political changes.

³

The theory of Public Sphere is elaborated in Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989.

The Habermasian concept of public sphere is problematic from the perspective of the epistemologies from the grassroots. Three things require our attention here: First of all, Habermas's public sphere tends to be a "bourgeois public sphere" which legitimizes the political domination of the state by creating an arena in which citizens can share their opinions about issues of common interest. In such a context, the official (bourgeois) public sphere is the institutional domain that constructs the legitimization of the hegemonic mode of domination of the state.

Secondly, the bourgeois public sphere idealizes a universal and normative way of reasoning, and as a result, it excludes the majority of the people—women, indigenous communities, Dalits, children—from its discursive arena. Stated differently, the concept of public sphere in this sense is an ideology that erases differences and the discursive authority of the subalterns. Thirdly, the Habermasian concept of public sphere is so monolithic that it does not recognize the presence of counterpublic spheres that exist along with the bourgeois public sphere. Patricia Hill Collins's recollection of the political significance of the black public sphere or black civil society—families, churches, fraternal organizations, and other institutions—is just one example of the host of counterpublics that are erased from discursive authority by the bourgeois public sphere.⁴

Feminist Christian ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's problematization of the term "public" is important for our consideration. The distinction between public and private initiated by liberalism divides society into a public sphere of economics and politics and a private sphere of domestic life. Family, sexuality, moral formation, and women's lives belong to the private sphere. As a result, intimate violence within the family is held as a private matter. "Personal relationship with God would be considered inconsequential for public life or social structures." Further, liberalism

Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, (1998): 22-32.

presupposes a singular public; where differences are erased for the singular common good. "Unquestioning acceptance of a singular public with singular common good may become a veneer for the legitimization of elite interests excluding the perspectives and interests of the less powerful."⁵

We see a similar ambiguity with the concept of civil society as well. According to John Keane, global civil society "enables individuals, groups and organizations to organize and to deploy their power across borders. . . . This society provides non-governmental structures and rules which enable individuals and groups to move and to decide things, to follow their inclinations, to bring governmental power-holders to heel, to engage in many kinds of mutually beneficial exchanges, even to work for the socialization of market economies so that production for social need, rather than for profit, prevails."⁶ This is precisely what the mainstream media propagated about the India Against Corruption movement. As a movement with followers from all walks of life who are committed to justice and freedom, the Anna movement was projected as *the* civil society alternative to our corrupt parliamentary democracy. But as we have witnessed already, the meta-visions and projects of the dominant civil society initiatives are incapable of addressing the deep-rooted structural evils as their perceptions are tainted by the interests of their own social locations of privilege.

This is the context in which critical engagement with the concepts of civil society and public sphere emerges. There is a need to problematize these concepts from the standpoints of the subalterns. The concept of subaltern counterpublic spheres developed by Nancy Fraser is paradigmatic for us. Fraser defines subaltern counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social

5 Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church: For the Life of the World*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, (2004): 7-8.

6 John Keane, "A World for All? Thoughts on Global Civil Society," in *A World for All? Global Civil Society in Political Theory and Trinitarian Theology*, William F. Storrar, Peter J. Casarella, and Paul Louis Metzger, eds. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, (2011): 32

groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”⁷ It is important to note here that in Fraser’s project, subaltern counterpublic spheres are not proposed as over against the bourgeois public spheres. Rather, they engage and dialogue continuously with the public spheres. The subaltern counterpublic spheres, therefore, are alternative discursive arenas for the construction and circulation of oppositional knowledge. The subaltern counterpublic spheres enable the communities at the grassroots to articulate the oppositional knowledge and to develop it as a political force to contest dominant knowledge claims. The recognition of the plurality of counterpublics further underscores the reality of the multiplicity of oppression that the communities face in their lifeworld, and strengthen the attempts for coalitions of solidarity.

Ethics, Knowledge, and Politics of Subaltern Counterpublic Spheres

Subaltern counterpublic sphere is located at the interface of ethics, knowledge, and politics. Knowledge is always constructed and contested based on ethics and politics. Subaltern epistemologies construct their counter-hegemonic epistemologies as oppositional, political and ethical praxis. For them, knowledge is a political and ethical praxis which enables them to understand critically asymmetrical social relations, to make ethical judgment on the dominant social structures that push them to the peripheries and erase their cognitive agency and to dream and design new worlds together. The Dalit understanding of epistemology endorses this view. As Gopal Guru rightly puts it, the Dalit category “is not a metaphysical construction. It derives its epistemological and political strength from the material social experience of its subjects. The Dalit category, in fact, promotes both the cognitive

7 Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interrupts: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition*. New York: Routledge, (1997): 81.

and emotional response of the collective subjects to the immediate world and its reconstruction.”⁸

When the “oppositional gaze” is absent in the discourses in the public sphere, they do not see the reality differently, thanks to the colonization of their perception by dominant ways of knowing. So, an active collective resistance to dominant ways of knowing is a prerequisite for subaltern oppositional gaze. As Bell Hooks rightly points out, with oppositional gaze “we do more than resist. We create *alternative texts* that are not solely reactions. As critical spectators, black women participate in a broad range of looking relations, contest, resist, revision, interrogate, and invent on multiple levels.”⁹ Lived experience becomes epistemological when communities transform this experience into an oppositional knowledge. It involves a critical understanding of the reality of subordination, and a vision and the political strategy to replace that reality with just and participatory social relations. Subaltern counterpublic spheres are the sites of this interface of ethics, knowledge, and politics.

Subaltern counterpublic sphere consists of communities at the grassroots who share in their bodies the scars of being objectified and represented in the history of knowledge. These are politically conscious communities at the margins, not disembodied or engaged activist individuals. Oppositional knowledge, in fact, is the rejection of the regime of truth of the public sphere which reduces the subalterns to be objects without agency to be represented and colonized. Only those communities that are consciously involved in the process of “coming to voice” and “coming to power” have the epistemic authority and cognitive agency to construct knowledge that is counter hegemonic. They are the movements that are active in contemporary subaltern counterpublic spheres.

8 Gopal Guru, “The Language of Dalit-Bahujan Political Discourse,” in *Dalit Identity and Politics*, Ghanshyam Shah, ed. New Delhi: Sage Publications, (2001): 102

9 Bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, eds. London: Routledge, (2003): 218. (Emphasis added.)

It is in this context that we affirm the social movements as the major constituents in the subaltern counterpublic spheres. Social movements are involved in the construction of an alternative society. Independent India has produced a host of social movements which can be considered “new” because of the diversity in their ideological moorings and in the perception of the social conflicts. The New Social Movements in India, according to Gail Omvedt, “have been explicitly antisystemic in their ideologies, looking towards a casteless, nonpatriarchal, nonlooting, sustainable society; they are involved, in their own view, in inherent conflict with the current social order. They are analyzing the current situation and causes of exploitation and oppression in new ways (rethinking Marxism), constituting a new interpretation of Indian society and history (reimagining the community), and seeking new modes of action to effect change”¹⁰

Social movements are therefore communicative media that encode information containing reflections on the context and the vision of an alternative reality. They are signifying systems through which a social system is communicated, critiqued, and explored. “Movements are not *made*, much less are they *launched* or led by leaders. Whenever opportunities permit or human disenchantments exhaust the limits of human perseverance, movements decoil (unfold) automatically and reveal themselves in the actions of the awakened conflictual consciousness of the collectivity.”¹¹ This is the politics that we witness in the subaltern counterpublic spheres of our times. It is an activism that seeks to understand social reality with a political and ethical motif in order to transform it radically. It is an engaged and collective construction of knowledge mediated by their particular experience of marginality. Counter-hegemonic discourses are generated in their struggles. For these reasons, subaltern counterpublic spheres such as social movements are the sites of an alternative politics and ethics.

10 Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, (1993): 318.

11 Rajendra Singh, *Social Movements Old, and New: A Post-modernist Critique*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, (2001): 20.

Occupy Theology

“You remind us that our Wall Street Bull has become a false-idol, a golden calf, and a symbol of our spiritual poverty. So we are here, from our Synagogues, and our Mosques, and our Churches, to stand with you, and to remind this country, that there can be no such thing as justice, until there is economic justice.” This is a prayer that still reverberates from the Wall Street as communities dare to “occupy” the public sphere to initiate counter-discourses and to experiment an alternative politics to re-create the world.

What has faith to do with such political activism in the public sphere? What is the theological criterion to discern the politics of the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street? How does the Church witness in the global civil society striving together to create a world for all, transcending religious borders? In what way the politics that emerge from the creative expressions of the excluded and the incarcerated inform the theological in our times?

In the context of our discussions on public theology, Mark Lewis Taylor’s new book *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* is paradigmatic as it demonstrates the art of doing theology at the intersection of “Theology” as a professional guild discipline that constructs and circulates doctrines reflecting upon the transcendent Other, and the “theological” as the “transimmanent” expression that refers to the “liminal space of fear, dread, and hope” is a profound theological insight.

The imposed social suffering is the context from which Taylor’s theological re-imagination emerges, and he categorically suggests that the political is the arena where the theological discerns and experiences the transimmanence. The “weight of the world,” for Taylor is the imposed social suffering caused by white racism, economic injustice, gender discrimination, and the diverse ways in which communities are being constructed as the “other”. Emancipatory politics is the agonistic political of the communities that are forced to bear the weight of the world. They are not merely weighed-down victims; rather they are communities

with moral agency—the new subjects of the emancipatory politics, who are committed to “weigh-in”. “This weighing-in occurs wherever weight concentrates, not just in the prison houses, but also in the warehouses of neglect that hold our infirm, aged, and mentally distressed—in the shanty towns of the poor, every “Gaza” where bodies are amassed, abandoned, reckoned disposable, weighed, finally, as of no account.”¹²

The theological, as Taylor proposes, “traces and theorizes the ways that persons and groups rendered subordinate and vulnerable by agonistic politics and its systemic imposed social suffering nevertheless haunt, unsettle, and perhaps dissolve the structures of those systems. The theological traces and theorizes the way this haunting congeals into specters and forces both threatening and promising alternative patterns and lifeways.” The subalterns articulate the theological in songs, poetry, narratives, slogans, graffiti and the like, and “they convey and constitute the haunting power of peoples bearing the weight of the world, but weighing-in spectrally with resistance and flourishing.”¹³

Taylor’s book invites us to experience the theological in the deployment of the prodigious art forms of the subalterns, and thereby be part of the emancipatory politics. It is an invitation to come out of the comfort zones of guild Theology which is preoccupied with metaphysical speculations on doctrines. It is a call to re-imagine the theological as the change of terrain that is beyond transcendence and immanence. It is an invitation to a costly commitment to the emancipatory politics to discern “the power, creativity, and vitality of life that is operative in the movements of the people, those bearing the weight of imposed social suffering.”

Reimagining Christian Ethics from the Subaltern Counterpublic Spheres

Felix Wilfred in his attempt to re-imagine Christian ethics in our times proposes certain radical shifts in the very discernment and praxis

¹² Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, (2011): 46.

¹³ *Ibid*, 12-13.

of ethics.¹⁴ These include a shift from individual morality to social ethics and ecological ethics, a shift from utilitarianism and consequentialism to an ethics based on aesthetics, a shift from an ethics of conformity to an ethics of refusal and dissent, and finally a shift from bourgeois ethics to subaltern ethics. Wilfred's description of the prevailing bourgeois ethics resembles the ethics of the contemporary bourgeois public sphere: "Good and evil, right and wrong are viewed from the bourgeois perspective; so too the idea of a good life.... It speaks about duties with reference to a predetermined order of things, and is not concerned about the social position from which right and wrong are viewed and judged. Bourgeois ethics in its economic application sees justice as fairness—something that happens automatically when self-interest is cultivated and set in motion." It is in this context that he explains the rationale for a subaltern ethics.

Subaltern ethics is committed to view realities from the subaltern standpoints. That calls for alternative ethical discernment and praxis informed by the ethics, politics, and knowledge of the subaltern counterpublic spheres. This shift in the very social location of Christian ethics, according to Wilfred is a Gospel imperative. The shift to subaltern ethics is therefore a discipleship journey because it arises out of the conviction that as knowledge, politics and ethics are integrally related in the political praxis of the subordinated others, their vantage point of the reality and visions of alternatives can provide us a better perspective which has the potential to interpret and to heal the desacralized earth and our sinful socio-economic relations. The mediation of the collective testimonials of the subaltern counterpublic spheres are crucial not because they present a universal version of the "truth" but because they have the potential to destabilize the regimes of truth, and pave the way for alternative ethical discernment and praxis that is life affirming.

How do we re-imagine Christian ethics in relation to the subaltern counterpublic spheres? Christian ethics is a theological and ethical praxis

14 Felix Wilfred, "Christian Ethics in a Changing Asia," in *Gurukul Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. XX, No. 2, June, (2009): 10-23.

in the crucible of subaltern politics to reclaim the moral agency of the people in order to realize their visions of liberation. The reclamation of moral agency is a theological and ethical imperative because it empowers the people in their struggles for selfhood. The purpose of Christian ethics is not to derive Christian behavior or attitude from the “given” sources of Scripture and tradition. Rather, as Enrique Dussel rightly puts it, ethics denotes “the future order of liberation, the demands of justice with respect to the poor, the oppressed, and their project of salvation.”¹⁵ The subaltern struggle against the colonization of the lifeworld as proleptic signs of the eschatological vision of the redeemed earth, is hence the discursive arena mediating the construction of authentic Christian ethics.

The rejection of the “given” sources in this project raises questions about the very purpose of theology. Theology happens in a community’s quest for selfhood, in the context of the recolonization of their lifeworld. It is a praxis informed by the “resources” of the community which include scriptures and religious traditions. This quest is neither a metaphysical speculation on metacosmic doctrines, nor a translation or application of “given” sources to contemporary situations. Rather, theology is a thoroughly this-worldly affair, problematizing, in the light of the vision of the redeemed earth, the threat to the movement of life paused by the “powers and principalities” which continue to commodify all life forms including human beings. It is not that we apply “given” doctrines to this existential reality or invoke God to intervene in concrete situations. Rather, we meet the Divine in a special way in the sufferings and the resistance of the victims. Arvind Nirmal articulates this position in a compelling way: “The ‘original’ and the ‘given’ in this context is our own situation, our own history, our own struggles, our own aspirations, our own fears and our own hopes. God is dynamically present in these. He [sic] is savingly active in these. This is where we have to discern the Gospel happening and becoming.”¹⁶

15 Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, New York: Orbis Books, (1988): 28

16 Quoted in Franklyn J. Balasundaram, *Prophetic Voices of Asia—Part II*. Colombo: Logos, (1994): 81.

The movements in the subaltern counterpublic spheres, as agents of counter-hegemonic praxis, are partakers in the salvific project of decolonization where the Gospel is happening. So the challenge that these movements pose is a radical shift in our ethical method. It invites us to rethink the “given” sources for doing Christian ethics. It transforms ethics into a transformative political praxis initiated by “the wretched of the earth” to enable the blossoming of the redeemed earth in our own particular local contexts. It does not begin with God, nor end in God. Rather, in its commitment to witness to the emergence of the Reign of God, theological praxis, as Sebastian Kappen puts it, becomes *theandric* practice.¹⁷ Wherever the victims develop an oppositional consciousness and collectively struggle to reclaim their selfhood and decolonize their lifeworld, the Spirit which hovered over the waters becomes ontologically present, transforming their fragmentary victories from the “bondage to decay,” into foretastes of the eschatological “freedom of the glory of the children of God”.

At the same time, the theological affirmation of the movements in the subaltern counterpublic spheres as agents of the *theandric* practice of the Reign of God underscores the situatedness of theological praxis in their particular experiences. Differently said, the ethical and theological reflections coming out of the discursive practices of the social movements are inherently antithetical to totalizing theological and ethical claims. Nor do they claim eternal validity and universality. The ethical reflections mediated by these movements affirm the provisional nature of all ethical theories. Larry Rasmussen’s reflections on the environmental justice movement are instructive here: “They work from concrete injuries of injustice and seek incremental remedies, relishing victories savory enough for another day’s sweat.”¹⁸ It is the incremental, fragmentary and

17 Sebastian Kappen. Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation: in *Reading Indian Christian Theology*. Volume .1, R. S. Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves, eds. London: SPCK, (1993): 25.

18 Larry Rasmussen, “Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice: Moral Theory in the Making?” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 24, no. 1 (2004): 4.

provisional victories of the people—the fragmentary victories to survive and self-represent—that make the eschatological utterly this-worldly.

Re-imagining Christian ethics in our times, therefore, happens in our organic immersion in the struggles and celebrations in the subaltern counterpublic spheres. As Arundhati Roy beautifully puts it, “The first step towards reimagining a world gone terribly wrong would be to stop the annihilation of those who have a different imagination—an imagination that is outside of capitalism as well as communism (and casteism and patriarchy). It has an altogether different understanding of what constitutes happiness and fulfillment. To gain this philosophical space, it is necessary to concede some physical space for the survival of those who may look like the keepers of our past, but who may really be the guides to our future. To do this, we have to ask our rulers: Can you leave the water in the rivers and the trees in the forest? Can you leave the bauxite in the mountain? If they say they cannot, then perhaps they should stop preaching morality to the victims of their wars.”¹⁹

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¹⁹ Arundhati Roy, “The Trickle-down Revolution” <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?267040>

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Editorial

The Year of Faith began on October 11, 2012 when Pope Benedict XVI called us for going back to the wellsprings of our faith. In this issue we go back to Scripture, the deposit of our faith, to become aware of the faith that feeds us in our faith journey.

The time of this call for the Year of Faith marks 20 years after the official launch of the new evangelization.¹ When countries become next door neighbours in our globalized world we realize that there are very many countries where Good News of Jesus Christ has never penetrated. To our amazement, very many who had paid heed to the Gospel of Jesus at one time, are progressively turning a deaf ear to the message of faith today. It is this context which prompted Blessed John Paul II in 1990 to issue his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* which called for a new evangelization and the mission *ad gentes* (to the nations). He invited ALL of us, not merely the Bishops and the priests, to do the supreme duty of proclaiming Christ to all peoples. This duty consists not just in praying but in engaging ourselves actively to baptize the evangelized and evangelize the baptized.² When the pot is empty there is nothing to share anything with anybody! It is this that dictates us to deliberate upon our own faith individually and collectively.

1 Blessed John Paul II first used the term New Evangelization in 1983 when he addressed the Latin American Bishops. Later he brought this term to the attention of the entire Church in his encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*.

2 See Dr. Scott Hahn, "The Year of Faith: Bible, the Eucharist and the New Evangelization" in *Franciscan Way*, Autumn 2012, 14-15. Accessed on 8/3/2013 in www.calameo.com/read/000056854c00c93636392?page=12

The Year of faith also marks 50 years after the opening of Vatican II. This Council shifted the understanding of Revelation and Faith from the cognitive sphere - "manifestation of truths" to an "interpersonal relationship or dialogue."³ When Vatican I emphasized on the revealed truths, Vatican II insisted on God who reveals and is revealed. Here faith is not an intellectual assent but a surrender to a Person. This personal dimension of faith is clearly seen in the early Church which followed a specific strategy, according to Scott Hahn, to help the people grow in faith.⁴ According to this strategy, the first stage of the faith journey is presentation or re-presentation of the Gospel to a person/ people. This is evangelization or re-evangelization. Here the person is given the sense of faith. Then the person reaches the stage of the catechumenate which lasts an entire year. After completing this, the catechumenate goes to Easter Vigil and becomes a communicant, that is to say, receives the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and First Holy Communion. It is at this stage he/she is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live the life of Christ and is introduced to the deepest mysteries of the faith. It signifies only the beginning. The deeper one goes into the faith, the better Christian one becomes. The Church Fathers explained this process by comparing it to falling in love where the first step of evangelizing was compared to courtship, the second step of catechizing was compared to engagement and the third step of sacramentalizing was compared to covenant relationship of marriage.⁵ It's really the beginning of knowing Jesus more, loving Jesus more and following Jesus more.

Faith is not a finished product or one time achievement. It's a process. In this process one's awareness of the presence and power of God in events personal or otherwise brings about a gradual transformation in the person concerned and he/she grows into faith maturity. This is very well portrayed in the article of James B. Dabhi SJ, who presents the gradual growth of Abraham's faith in analyzing the dialogue between

3 Remigius Sequeira, "Revelation in Christian Tradition," in *Emerging India and the Word of God*, Paul Puthanangadi (ed.), NBCLC, Bangalore, 1991, 110.

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Abraham and God in the book of Genesis. The mystery of God, for the Israelites, is revealed in history. God reveals Godself in history. Their faith also is shaped by history. Peter Ignatius SJ, runs through the historical books to highlight this sense of history in our faith journey. Scaria Kuthirakkattel SVD, in his article highlights that faith is a gift as the Kingdom of God which Jesus inaugurated was also a gift from God. We can't earn faith. Our sense that we can earn faith is an illusion. We are embodied and we need something or somebody embodied as a model of faith. Thomas Malipurathu SVD, goes back to the book of Acts to present such models of faith from the earliest stages of the Church history. Santhosh Maria, BS too, presents how Mary could become our model of faith in our light and darkness. Finally Errol D' Lima SJ, shows how some of the faith statements of the early Church such as 'creeds' can become a source of meaningfulness in our faith journey.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to all the contributors of the articles. I thank very specially Royston, the Karnataka Jesuit scholastic who helped me in preparing the manuscripts. It is hoped that during this year of faith these articles would serve us to go back to the Scripture the wellspring of our faith and quench our longing for God. May they also help us to give expression to our own faith experience which may bring many more to this ever flowing fountain.

Selva Rathinam, SJ

Head of the Biblical Department

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Abraham: Our Father in Faith

James B. Dabhi

The author is a Jesuit, professor of Sacred Scriptures at Gujarat Vidya Deep, Regional Seminary in Gujarat. In this contribution he studies the characterization of Abraham, the Father of Faith, in the Abraham Narrative of Genesis. Here he selects a forty-year period of the lifespan of Abraham which is bracketed by two landmark communications of YHWH with Abraham. The first communication of YHWH demands Abraham to leave his country, clan, and kindred. The last communication of YHWH exacts Abraham to offer his only son. Picking up the inclusion formed by these two communications of YHWH which contain six more dialogues between YHWH and Abraham., he proves how Abraham undergoes transformation gradually and eventually.

Introduction

Faith from the perspective of the Pentateuch pervades a wide spectrum, too unwieldy to peruse incisively. After prolonged pondering, analogous to a hovering honeybee, I make up my mind to spend a replenishing time in the garden of Genesis among its four flowerbeds, viz., the Pre-History, the Abraham Narrative, the Jacob Narrative, and the Joseph Narrative.¹ Among these four flowerbeds, Abraham Narrative fascinates me most, because it contains the nectar I am looking for. Abraham Narrative begins in the traditional Masoretic Text, which is preserved in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* 1977 that reproduces the Leningrad manuscript B 19A and which dates from the eleventh century

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A.D., at 11:27 and ends at 25:18. The Abraham Narrative consists of three hundred and eighty-four verses. My interest is not vested in the Abraham Narrative en bloc per se. I aspire to understand the character of Abraham vis-à-vis that of YHWH. Abraham is the patriarch of my Israelite sisters and brothers. Abraham is the Father in Faith of my Christian sisters and brothers. According to a Gujarati adage: 'as the tree, so the fruit; as the father, so the son,' I crave to comprehend the character traits of my Father in Faith, Abraham. My personal relationship with YHWH does not exhibit a linear trajectory, as I experience high tides and low tides, interruptions and enhancements. Does my Father in Faith undergo the same experience in his relationship with YHWH in the Abraham Narrative?

Process of Zeroing In

Dealing with everything depicted about Abraham in the Abraham Narrative falls beyond the scope of this essay. Zeroing in on a particular phase in Abraham's life constitutes a sagacious step. The Abraham Narrative proffers essential indicators for the process of zeroing in. Those indicators are the first time that YHWH converses with Abraham (12:1-9) and the last time that YHWH does so (22:1-19). YHWH's two acts of conversing with Abraham form an inclusion.

The narrator mentions about sixty characters in the inclusion formed by 12:1-9 and 22:1-19. Abraham is one of these sixty characters. From the point of view of the significance of these characters to the plot of the Abraham Narrative, they can be assorted into one of the following categories: 1) hero or protagonist, secondary character, antagonist, 2) foils, 3) functionaries or agents, ficelles, and 4) crowd actors, chorus, and walk-ons.² The narrator highlights the protagonist in the galaxy of these characters. I discover that protagonist highlighted by the narrator through a process as follows: To trace the protagonist in the Abraham Narrative, I set a criterion of initiating the dialogue with the other character. The character, who initiates the maximum number of dialogues with the other characters, is the protagonist and that will become the

2 See Jean Louis Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us:" *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, Subsidia Biblica -13 (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1990), 86-87.

subject of my study. The rationale for setting such a criterion is supplied by Robert Alter. According to him, quantitatively, a remarkably large part of the narrative burden is carried by dialogue. As a rule, when an event seems important, the narrator renders that event through dialogue; so, the transition from narration to dialogue provides in itself some implicit measure of what is deemed essential.³ In the Abraham Narrative, about a hundred and sixty-five verses portray the dialogue and eleven verses the monologue. Dialogue and monologue together form about 45% of the total verses of the Abraham Narrative. Alter further states that direct speech by the characters has a higher degree of certitude of revealing their inner being. He provides the scale of means, in ascending order of explicitness and certainty, for conveying information about the motives, the attitudes, and the moral nature of characters. The scale of means is as follows: 1) report of actions, 2) appearance, gestures, posture, and costume, 3) comment of one character on another, 4) direct speech by the character, 5) inward speech either summarized or quoted as interior monologue, and 6) statements by the narrator.⁴

Upon reading and rereading the Abraham Narrative several times, I realized that YHWH initiates the dialogue with four interlocutors (namely, Abraham, Hagar, Lot, and King Abimelech), Abraham with five (namely, Sarah, Lot, YHWH, King Abimelech, and Abraham's two young men), Pharaoh with one (namely, Abraham), King Melchizedek with one (namely, Abraham), the king of Sodom with one (namely, Abraham), Sarah with two (namely, Abraham and YHWH), Lot with two (namely, YHWH and Lot's family members), the men of Sodom with one (namely, Lot), the elder daughter of Lot with one (namely, the younger daughter of Lot), King Abimelech with two (namely, Abraham and Sarah), and Isaac with one (namely, Abraham). This survey of the characters, from the point of view of their initiating dialogues with the others, reveals that the busiest characters in the Abraham Narrative are YHWH and Abraham, making them both the protagonists. I do not include protagonist YHWH from my study, because I am interested only in the human characters. I concentrate on those human characters with whom protagonist YHWH enters into dialogue. YHWH dialogues with four

3 See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 182.

4 See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 116-117.

characters, viz., Abraham, Hagar, Lot, and King Abimelech. Any of these four human characters could be the subject of my study.

I venture, now, to explain why my choice necessarily settles on Abraham. I commence the process of eliminating YHWH's interlocutors in the reverse order. Apropos of King Abimelech, YHWH initiates dialogue with him to rescue Sarah from his clutches (20:3, 6-7). Had not King Abimelech abducted Sarah to make her his wife, YHWH would not have addressed him at all. So, the character of King Abimelech can conveniently be put aside. Lot remains one of the three contending characters, with whom YHWH has a verbal exchange. The dialogue of YHWH with Lot is entailed for saving the latter from the impending catastrophe that is to befall Sodom and Gomorrah. The act of saving Lot is engendered precisely because of Abraham, who is remembered by YHWH at the extirpation of those two cities (19:29). If YHWH had not to remember Abraham, the issue of saving Lot would never have arisen. If saving Lot had not loomed as an issue, then YHWH could have avoided altogether the dialogue with Lot. So, Lot, too, can be dropped. Now, there remain still two characters, namely, Abraham and Hagar, with whom YHWH converses in time of their respective crises and to whom YHWH promises a multitude of offspring. The dialogue of YHWH takes a form of covenantal relationship in the case of Abraham, but not in the case of Hagar. Besides, YHWH dialogues with Abraham eight times, but with Hagar just two times. YHWH converses with Abraham, employing fifty-three verses that amount to about 30% of the dialogues in the Abraham Narrative. Thus, from the qualitative (i.e., covenant) and quantitative (i.e., 30%) points of view, Abraham should be selected for the study in this inclusio, viz., 12:1-22:19.

Eight Encounters between YHWH and Abraham

The Abraham Narrative provides eight encounters between YHWH and Abraham. Encounter One (12:1-9) depicts the call of Abraham. YHWH mandates him to leave his country, clan, and father's house to go to the land that YHWH shows. YHWH promises to make him a great nation. Abraham obeys and reaches the land of Canaan (i.e., today's Israel). YHWH further promises the land of Canaan to Abraham's offspring. In response, Abraham builds an altar. Encounter Two (13:14-18) ensues Abraham's separation from his nephew Lot.

YHWH invites Abraham to survey the land in all its four directions and, then, promises that land to Abraham as well as to his offspring. YHWH promises to make Abraham's offspring like the dust of the earth. In response, Abraham moves his tent, comes to Hebron, lives there, and builds an altar. Encounter Three (15:1-21) presents the covenant of the pieces. Childless Abraham poses his first question to YHWH in 15:2a, "What will you give me?"⁵ and, then, proposes his plan to adopt his slave. In response, YHWH deprecates his adoption plan and vows to grant him one heir and offspring as many as the stars of the sky. Abraham believes. Then, Abraham interrogates the second time apropos of the land in 15:8b, "How will I know that I will possess it?" In response, YHWH makes a covenant with him by passing through the divided sacrificial victims in the form of a smoking firepot and a flaming torch, and by promising to his offspring the land encased by the river of Egypt and the River Euphrates. Encounter Four (17:1-27) narrates the covenant of circumcision. YHWH transmutes the name of Abraham, promises to make him nations, establishes a covenant with him, and commands him to imprint the mark of circumcision in his flesh. YHWH permutes the name of Sarah, too, and promises her a son, whose name will be Isaac. In response, Abraham falls on his face, laughs, doubts, and pleads for Ishmael. YHWH reiterates the promise of Sarah bearing a son, announces the exact time of his birth, pronounces YHWH's intention to establish a covenant with that son, and bestows blessing on Ishmael but not the covenant. In response, Abraham performs the ritual of circumcision. Encounter Five (18:1-16) reports Abraham's hospitality to his guests—the three men. Abraham invites the three men to his tent; in response, they oblige. YHWH becomes the guest of Abraham incognito and reiterates the promise of Sarah bearing a son in the subsequent springtime. In response, Abraham remains reticent. Encounter Six (18:17-33) contains Abraham's supplication for Sodom and Gomorrah. YHWH avers him YHWH's plan with regard to Sodom and Gomorrah. In response, Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah; YHWH accedes. Encounter Seven (21:12-14) deals with Abraham's severance from his co-wife Hagar and his firstborn son Ishmael. Sarah demands that Abraham expel Hagar and Ishmael.

5 I translate here and throughout the project the Masoretic Text in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977).

YHWH endorses Sarah's demand and instructs Abraham to comply. In response, Abraham sends away Hagar and Ishmael. Encounter Eight (22:1-19) demonstrates Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac. YHWH orders Abraham to immolate Isaac as a burnt offering. In response, Abraham performs a series of actions, but, before he could plunge the knife into Isaac's neck, God interrupts him and approbates his almost-sacrifice of Isaac.

Epoch-Making Encounters

I prefix these eight encounters with the appellation 'epoch-making' as they bring about significant alterations in the character of Abraham. As a consequence of Encounter One (12:1-9), Abraham's homeland is shifted. So far, he lived in Haran (which was a city in today's Iraq); now, he dwells in Canaan. Encounter Two (13:14-18) approves Abraham's act of excising his nephew Lot from him. Henceforth, Abraham will not have any of his kith and kin with him; thus, the original command of YHWH to Abraham is executed in totality. Encounter Three (15:1-21) declares Abraham as the righteous person, because of his faith in YHWH. Moreover, Abraham climbs a higher level of intimacy with YHWH, because of YHWH's covenant with him. Encounter Four (17:1-27) makes Abraham enter into bilateral relationship with YHWH. Hereafter, circumcision will be that indelible mark on his body that will remind him his commitment to YHWH. Encounter Five (18:1-16), which Abraham initiates with YHWH unwittingly while rendering hospitality to the three Visitors, lets him know the exact time of the birth of the promised son through Sarah. Encounter Six (18:17-33), wherein Abraham solicits on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, takes place because YHWH reveals to him YHWH's plan. YHWH distinguishes him to be the one, who will teach his generations the way of YHWH. Abraham is kept in high esteem by YHWH and, therefore, he is allowed to peep into the mind of YHWH. Abraham takes full advantage of this rare privilege and pleads for the populace of those ill-fated cities. Encounter Seven (21:12-14) encourages Abraham to desert Ishmael and Hagar. Thus, Isaac will remain as the sole heir of Abraham. Encounter Eight (22:1-19) brings forth the most sublime trait of Abraham's character. Abraham believes in the all providing YHWH, not only orally but also functionally.

Gradual Clarity of the Promise

The promise that YHWH makes to Abraham contains three elements: offspring (12:2a), blessing (12:2a), and land (12:7a). One of these three elements, viz., offspring, keeps recurring in all the encounters that YHWH has with Abraham. This offspring element constitutes that thread that passes through all the beads, namely, the encounters, forming them into a necklace. Each encounter of YHWH with Abraham augments the clarity of the offspring element.

Encounter One (12:1-9) promises Abraham to make him a great nation (12:2a). To paraphrase the same, Encounter One mentions the number of the offspring that Abraham would have. This huge number is reiterated in yet clearer terms in Encounter Two (13:12-14), the moment Abraham lets go Lot to become independent of Lot. The departure of Lot affords to YHWH a momentous opportunity to reassure Abraham the promise of the offspring. Abraham's offspring will be as countless as the dust of the earth (13:16). Encounter Three (15:1-21) promises Abraham just one son, a son not through his adopting scheme, but through his own generating potency (15:4). That son is the seed of the multitude that is already promised twice heretofore in 12:2a and in 13:16. Once more, YHWH numbers Abraham's offspring, indicating that they will be as numerous as the stars of the heaven. Thrice the promise of multitude is mentioned. In Hebrew culture, number 'three' suggests the idea of completeness.⁶ By the time YHWH has had three encounters with Abraham, YHWH has made it amply lucid that Abraham will beget a son of his own and, through that son, the multitude of offspring. Encounter Four (17:1-27) names the woman, who will bear the son that Abraham will beget. That woman is Sarah (17:16a). YHWH once again promises Abraham the nations through her. Moreover, the name of the son and

⁶ The symbolic use of number 'three' suggests the idea of completeness—of beginning, middle, and end. Tripartite composition occurs in some cases without mention of the number. The formula "and God blessed" occurs three times in the P creation story (Gen 1:22, 28; 2:3). The sanctuary had three divisions, viz., court, holy place, and most holy place (Exod 26:33; 27:9; 1 Kgs 6:16-17). The blessing of Aaron (Num 6:24-26) mentions the divine name three times and predicates three pairs of divine action. See M. H. Pope, "Number: Numbering: Numbers," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, Thomas Samuel Kepler, John Knox, Herbert Gordon May, Samuel Terrien, and Emory Stevens Bucke (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 564.

the time of his birth are announced solemnly. By now, Abraham is ninety-nine years old (17:1). When YHWH encountered Abraham the first time, he was seventy-five years of age (12:4b). YHWH has taken almost a quarter of a century to reveal step by step that the promise of the multitude of offspring will be realized through a son generated by Abraham himself through his wife Sarah. Encounter Five (18:1-16) adds the temporal dimension to the fulfilment of the promise of the son. YHWH vouches YHWH's return the following spring, when Sarah will have a son (18:10a). Encounter Six (18:17-33) is solely reserved to stave off the annihilation that loomed large over the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Nothing apropos of either the son or the multitude of offspring appears in this encounter. Finally, the promised son is born at the appointed time (21:2b). In Encounter Seven (21:12-14), YHWH instructs Abraham to obey Sarah concerning Ishmael (21:12a). Ishmael has to vacate to create space for Isaac as the latter is the seed, which is to sprout and flourish into the multitude of offspring. At the end, Encounter Eight (22:1-19) exacts the head of Isaac in 22:2b, "and offer him there as burnt-offering on one of the mountains, which I shall say to you." However, that offering was intercepted by the Self of YHWH in the nick of time, when Abraham was about to slaughter Isaac (22:12).

In sum, the encounters began with the promise of the multitude, which is finally fulfilled in one son that is begotten by Abraham through Sarah after twenty-five long years of waiting. Once the son of the promise reaches the age of physical maturity and reasoning ability, YHWH commands Abraham to offer that son as a holocaust. No sooner did Abraham prepare to offer the son, YHWH desisted Abraham. YHWH took time to reveal the full plan of YHWH to Abraham. Concomitantly, YHWH took time to know Abraham thoroughly and fully.

Relationship That Abraham Ruptures But Yhwh Repairs

While YHWH was busy, giving dictums to Abraham in 12:1-22:19; equally busy was Abraham, fulfilling those divine injunctions but less than full. In Encounter One (12:1-9), YHWH ordered Abraham to renounce three of his moorings, viz., his country, his relatives, and his father's house (12:1). Abraham left his country and his father's house, but not his relative. He took his nephew Lot along, constituting the first rupture in his relationship with YHWH. Abraham's cleaving to Lot causes

that first rupture. Had Abraham left all his three anchors, his response would have been complete.

The second rupture is created, when Abraham knowingly runs the risk of surrendering his wife Sarah to the harem of the king of Egypt, to survive the severe famine in the land of Canaan (12:10-16). Abraham is promised the multitude of offspring by YHWH. By letting Sarah be the wife of the king of Egypt, Abraham jeopardizes the promise of YHWH. YHWH will not be able to fulfill YHWH's promise, once Sarah is no longer with Abraham. The nature of this rupture is so acute that it requires immediate attention. Hence, YHWH barges in and emancipates Sarah from the harem of the king of Egypt (12:17-19). Abraham's deed of handing over Sarah to the king of Egypt causes the second rupture, but YHWH repairs it by acting on a war footing.

As the narrative progresses, the first rupture that occurred due to Abraham's cleaving to Lot is once again highlighted, when Abraham returns to Canaan from Egypt accompanied by Lot (13:1). Had Abraham left Lot behind to stay on in Egypt, the lacuna in Abraham's obedience of Encounter One (12:1-9) would have been rectified. Lot's presence with Abraham in Canaan creates daily conflicts between the shepherds of Lot and that of Abraham's (13:7). Abraham steers the way out of this everyday strife by instructing Lot to separate from him (13:9). With the separation from Lot, the first rupture is repaired. Immediately, Encounter Two (13:14-18) takes place as if to vindicate Abraham with regard to his decision apropos of Lot.

The third rupture is caused by the plan that Abraham is contemplating of adopting a son in Encounter Three (15:1-21). Probably, at the root of this plan lies Abraham's conviction that YHWH cannot grant him a son. Abraham employs the rhetoric to let YHWH know that YHWH is unable to disrupt his childlessness. Therefore, Abraham has to maneuver the available human means to have a son. Abraham's project of adopting his slave Eliezer of Damascus as his son generates the third rupture. The quick response of YHWH to Abraham betrays the critical nature of the third rupture. YHWH rejects Abraham's adoption agenda and assures him that he himself will beget a son. Moreover, as if to demonstrate the potency of YHWH, YHWH evinces him the stars of the heaven and promises him that many offspring

(15:4-5). Abraham believed in YHWH (15:6a). In spite of the three ruptures caused by him hitherto, Abraham is acknowledged as the righteous one because of his faith in YHWH (15:6b).

The fourth rupture occurs, when Abraham acquiesces in Sarah's offer to take her maid Hagar as his co-wife. Abraham becomes father of Ishmael through Hagar at the age of eighty-six years (16:16). One full decade has passed since Abraham was first promised an offspring and, now, Ishmael is born. However, Ishmael is not that son of the promise, which will be made vivid by YHWH eventually. Thus, Abraham's generating the son Ishmael through Hagar constitutes the fourth rupture.

The fifth rupture is formed, when YHWH promises Abraham a son through his wife Sarah (17:16) in Encounter Four (17:1-27). This promise is derided by Abraham, thinking that a child cannot be born to a couple, who is decrepit. Abraham is hundred years old and Sarah ninety. The well advanced age or the physical inability of the couple causes this rupture. YHWH attempts to repair this rupture by disavowing Abraham's intimation to establish Ishmael as the son of the promise and by reiterating that it is Sarah, who will give birth to the son of the promise. In addition, YHWH suggests the name for the son that Sarah will bear (17:19). Such a response of YHWH bespeaks that YHWH is serious about giving him the son.

The sixth rupture comes about, when YHWH announces the fixed time of the birth of the promised son in Encounter Five (18:1-16). Sarah was, by then, well advanced in age and, so, unable to conceive. Her menopause makes her ridicule this promise (18:10-12). She imitates her husband in responding to the promise of YHWH in similar vein. Since Abraham and Sarah together constitute the recipients of the promise, the disbelief of either of them in the promise-maker creates a rupture in their relationship with YHWH. The inability of Sarah to conceive forms the reason for the sixth rupture. This rupture is taken care of by YHWH on the spot through the rhetorical question, "is anything too difficult for YHWH?" and, then, through the reiteration of the promise of the birth of the son at the appointed time (18:14).

The seventh rupture seems virtually identical to the second one. At the second rupture, Abraham cedes Sarah to the king of Egypt

(12:10-16); at the seventh rupture, Abraham cedes Sarah to King Abimelech. Abraham had introduced Sarah as his sister that encouraged King Abimelech to take Sarah away (20:2). The fixed time of the birth of the son of Sarah is already announced by YHWH. In that context, Abraham's playing the same old stratagem could prove hazardous. Without delay, however, YHWH does the damage control by ordering King Abimelech to restore Sarah to her husband Abraham (20:3-7). Abraham's callousness towards Sarah caused the seventh rupture; YHWH repaired it no sooner than did it occur. At the repairing of the seventh rupture, YHWH informs King Abimelech that Abraham, being a prophet, will pray for the king and the king will live (20:7). Intriguing to note that at the repairing of the third rupture, YHWH reckoned the faith of Abraham as his righteousness (15:6) and at the repairing of the seventh rupture, YHWH acclaimed Abraham as prophet whose prayers are heard.

The fourth rupture due to Abraham's begetting son Ishmael through Hagar (16:16) is so far not repaired. YHWH takes substantial amount of time in attending to this rupture. In 21:10, Sarah pressurizes Abraham to drive away Hagar along with her son Ishmael. This demand constitutes the last word of Sarah reported by the narrator in the Abraham Narrative. YHWH counsels the perplexed Abraham in Encounter Seven (21:12-14) to comply with Sarah's demand (21:12). I conjecture Ishmael to be of about fourteen years of age by now, because at his birth Abraham was eighty-six years of age (16:16) and, according to 21:5, Abraham is hundred years old. Thus, Hagar and Ishmael bid farewell, leaving full space for Isaac. The first word of Sarah in the Abraham Narrative was addressed to Abraham and it was concerning Hagar to take her as his co-wife (16:2). The last word of Sarah in the same narrative is again addressed to the same man and concerning the same woman, but with a diametrically opposite purpose, namely, to send her away with her son (21:10). The narrator has closed the Sarah-Hagar episode in like manner as the narrator had opened it.

Out of these seven ruptures, the ones caused due to cleaving to Lot and due to fathering of Ishmael were not repaired immediately. The rest five ruptures were repaired almost the moment they were created. Such urgency bodes that those ruptures had the potential to put a definite end to the relationship between YHWH and Abraham. The ruptures on account of Lot and Ishmael were allowed to persist till the opportune moment had arrived.

There are seven encounters that YHWH has with Abraham prior to the climactic eighth encounter. There are seven ruptures that are caused by Abraham and Sarah in their relationship with YHWH. YHWH repairs all the seven ruptures. If number 'seven' signifies something,⁷ then it is the complete encounter or the complete repairing of the relationship of YHWH with Abraham. With all their ups and downs, Abraham and Sarah were finally able to strike a perfect relationship with YHWH.

This perfect relationship of Abraham with YHWH is demonstrated in the ultimate Encounter Eight (22:1-19). YHWH exacts Abraham to immolate his son, his only son, whom he loves (22:2). Abraham executes YHWH's command pedantically, but before he could plunge the knife into his son Isaac, YHWH forbids Abraham. Consequently, YHWH declares that now YHWH knows Abraham through and through. According to YHWH, Abraham is a God-fearing man. In his turn, Abraham acknowledges that YHWH is the all providing God.

Temporal Dimension

At the beginning of the inclusio, Abraham was seventy-five years old, when he emigrated from Haran to the land of Canaan (12:4b). When the promised son, i.e., Isaac, was born, Abraham was hundred years old (21:5a). The inclusio offers no other time indicator, mentioning Abraham's age, till the end. The last reference of Abraham's age in the Abraham Narrative is found at his death in 25:7-8, which remains well outside the inclusio. He died at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years (25:7-8). The age of Isaac, who carried the wood climbing one of the mountains in the land of Moriah and who asked that sensible, reasonable, and logical question (22:7) in the last encounter, could plausibly be inferred to be fifteen years. If this conjecture of Isaac's age is agreeable, then Abraham might be about a hundred and fifteen years old, when the inclusion closes. Such a computation denotes that between two landmark

⁷ With regard to number 'seven,' M. H. Pope informs the reader in the conclusion of his article, "It is hard to say what the numerous symbolic uses of seven in the Bible have in common. Perhaps the simplest and most comprehensive generalization that can be made is that seven denotes completeness, perfection, consummation." M. H. Pope, "Seven, Seventh, Seventy," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, 295.

communications of YHWH with him (i.e., in 12:1-9 and in 22:1-19), Abraham's life span spreads over forty years.⁸ As the forty-year period in the wilderness constituted an era of formation for the Israelites from a crowd to a country; so, too, the forty-year period of YHWH's communications with Abraham formed an epoch of transformation of Abraham from Abraham having partial faith in YHWH into Abraham having total faith in YHWH.

Four Acknowledgements by YHWH

At crucial junctures, YHWH acknowledges the ennobling character traits of Abraham. In Encounter Three (15:1-6), YHWH acknowledges the character trait of Abraham the first time. YHWH reckons Abraham's attitude to believe in YHWH's promise and potency as his righteousness (15:6). YHWH declares Abraham to be a righteous person. In Encounter Six (18:17-33), YHWH monologues apropos of Abraham (18:17-19), informing the reader the character trait of Abraham the second time. YHWH could not overestimate Abraham (18:19). YHWH acknowledges that in distinguishing Abraham, YHWH has a purpose, namely, that Abraham will teach his offspring to keep the way of YHWH by doing righteousness and justice. YHWH feels confident that Abraham will live up to the expectation of YHWH. Abraham has the ability to move the heart of YHWH through his intercession, which is manifested in his pleading with YHWH on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:23-32). Eventually, YHWH informs King Abimelech about Abraham, when the need arose (20:7). YHWH acclaims Abraham as a prophet and emphasizes his intercessory ability, constituting the third acknowledgement

8 M.H. Pope expounds that number 'forty' is a symbolic and sacred number. Number 'forty' is used as a round number to designate a fairly long period of time in terms of human existence or endurance. Forty years is the approximate length of a generation. A human being was full grown at forty (see Exod 2:11). The forty-year period in the wilderness (see Exod 16:35; Deut 2:7; 8:2; 29:5) was long enough for a whole generation to die off (see Num 14:33; 32:13). The forty-year reigns of David, Solomon, and Joash (see 2 Sam 5:4; 1 Kgs 2:11; 11:42; 2 Chr 24:1) are proof of divine favor. Forty days or years was the common duration of critical situation, punishment, fasting, repentance, and vigil (see Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6; Exod 24:18; 34:28; Num 13:25; Deut 9:9, 11, 18, 25; 10:10). Forty lashes was the maximum flagellation (see Deut 25:3). See M. H. Pope, "Number: Numbering: Numbers," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, 565.

of the character trait of Abraham. Encounter Eight (22:1-19) forms a test of Abraham, but he does not know it. During this encounter, YHWH admits the fourth time the character trait of Abraham, namely, that Abraham fears God. YHWH could utter this paramount acknowledgement based on the fact that Abraham did not withhold his son, his only son. To paraphrase Abraham's act, Abraham proffered topmost priority to YHWH.

YHWH revealed the essence of the character of Abraham by making four assertions. At the end of the first group of three encounters, YHWH makes the first acknowledgement: Abraham is righteous. At the end of the second group of two encounters, YHWH makes the second acknowledgement: YHWH has distinguished Abraham for a sublime purpose and YHWH has total trust that Abraham will accomplish it. At the end of the third group of one encounter, YHWH makes the third acknowledgement: Abraham is a prophet, whose prayers are powerful. At the end of the fourth group of two encounters, YHWH makes the fourth and the climactic acknowledgement: Abraham fears YHWH.

Faith Constitutes Journey with YHWH and Toward YHWH

The very first locution of YHWH to Abraham in the Abraham Narrative is a command; the very first response of Abraham to YHWH is a non-verbal obedience. The very last word of YHWH to Abraham in the Abraham Narrative is again a command; the very last response of Abraham to YHWH is again a non-verbal obedience. In his first non-verbal obedience, Abraham withholds his nephew Lot; in his last non-verbal obedience, he does not withhold anything, not even his only and beloved son Isaac. YHWH candidly confesses this legendary act of Abraham in unequivocal terms. Abraham's obedience is less than complete at the first encounter, but it is complete at the last encounter. The conjectured life span of forty years has allowed the character traits of Abraham to blossom to the full. The blossoming of the character traits is gradual, but not linear. If by keeping Lot with him, Abraham demonstrates himself less obedient to YHWH; then, by letting Lot go from him, Abraham demonstrates himself totally dependent on YHWH. If by contemplating adoption of slave Eliezer, Abraham shows himself to be a man of suspicion; then, by trusting in the potency of YHWH, Abraham evinces himself to be a man of faith. If by holding on to Ishmael and by not believing that Sarah could bear a son, Abraham

exhibits himself as a short-sighted person; then, by welcoming the guests and receiving the admonition apropos of the omnipotence of YHWH, Abraham exhibits himself as a farsighted person. In the only monologue of YHWH stretched over three verses in the Abraham Narrative (18:17-19), YHWH expresses YHWH's confidence that Abraham will justify his appointment as the teacher of his descendants to keep the way of YHWH. Abraham's beseeching with YHWH for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah reveals his ability of heartrending supplication. YHWH extols him as a prophet, who could pray for King Abimelech. The birth of the promised son Isaac unfortunately lands Abraham in a crisis, where he has to sacrifice his firstborn son Ishmael for the sake of his beloved son Isaac. In that crisis, Abraham comes across as a pathos-filled father. However, this crisis turns out to be a mere prelude to the horrendous crisis that awaits him, when he has to sacrifice his only son Isaac for the sake of YHWH. Abraham is all prepared to offer Isaac, but before he could plunge the knife into Isaac, YHWH intercepts him, applauding: "... now I know that you fear God . . ." I resonate with YHWH apropos of the characterization of Abraham as I navigate through all these eight encounters that YHWH had with Abraham. I observe that the relationship of Abraham with YHWH traverses through the zigzag path, but there comes a milestone in the form of option for YHWH over Isaac, from where a linear and straight forward movement begins.

Conclusion

The Abraham that I come to know at the end of the first encounter (12:1-9) and the Abraham at the end of the last (22:1-19), the two Abrahams, are drastically disparate. I marvel how gradually the character of Abraham grows unto the full stature of a God-fearing person! Analogous to a sculptor, who begins to sculpt, YHWH hits the first blow with hammer and chisel against a rough block of stone called Abraham. Eventually, after competent chiselling, YHWH's finishing touch creates a life-size, emotion-filled, impressive, and imposing Abraham. Temporally, forty years or so are added to Abraham's age. Relationally, the childless Abraham has become father of a son now. Potentially, the promise made at 12:1-7 remains virtually the same at 22:16-18. Nothing seems to have substantially changed. What is transformed significantly is the character of Abraham. YHWH touched and Abraham is transformed. Abraham has fully grown as Father in Faith indeed!

“Faithful” God and “Believing” People: a Re-Reading of History in the Bible

Peter Ignatius

Here the author looks at our salvation history as given in the Bible from three different points of view. In the first reading he narrates the salvation history from the over arching theme of a Faithful God walking with the Believing People. In the second reading, he focuses on the historical books of the Bible – Joshua to the Maccabees. In the third reading he narrows it down to two historical moments of the Israelites where the Faithful God and Believing People are explicitly extolled by the gentiles.

A sense of history is very important for our pilgrimage. Without a deep-rooted sense of history, we will not be able to move forward meaningfully. For Israel, the basic data for theology was obtained from history, from an understanding of what was going on, and what the collected tradition signified. Such basic sense of history led the Israelites to an intense interest in the collection and preservation of historical traditions and Israel was one of the first peoples in history to see their past in this manner. The tenth-century Israel in the Jerusalem courts of David and Solomon produced two remarkable historical works: the first written edition of Israel’s epic story of her origins from the creation of the world to the establishment of the nation on the soil of Palestine¹ and the Court History of David as King. Neither work can be completely recovered; nevertheless extensive portions of each can be identified so that we can judge their nature.²

1 It is called the work of the Yahwist by scholars.

2 Boling, R. G., & Wright, G. E. (2008). *Joshua: A new translation with notes and commentary*. (6). New Haven; London: Yale University Press.

In this year of faith, it is apt to relook at our salvation history as given in the Bible, from three different points of view. In the first reading let me re-narrate the salvation history as presented by our sacred scripture from the over arching theme of a Faithful God walking with a Believing People. In the second reading, I will focus on the historical books of the Bible –Joshua to the Maccabees. In the third reading I will narrow down to two historical moments of the Israelites' where the Faithful God and Believing People are explicitly extolled by the gentiles.

The First Reading: God's Continuous and Faithful Interventions in Our History

The first two chapters of Genesis (Gen 1-2) begin our history with the creation of "heaven and earth" and the last two chapters of the book of Revelation (Rev 21-22) end our history with the creation of "New Heaven and New Earth". In the biblical linear history of the universe, the beginning and the end are Creation and New Creation respectively. While the first Creation has day and night, sun, moon and stars, sea, symbolising pain and death, the final New Creation will have none of these. There will only be day - God will be the light and there will be no tears and death. Right at the outset, we get a clear and distinct destination designed by God. The end will be far superior and incomparable to that of the beginning.

God labors in love to create a beautiful universe for the humans whom God creates in God's own image – male and female God creates them. As God is Faithful, so God's own images will also be Faithful. God places them in the Garden of Eden with the hope that they would enjoy and spend their lives blissfully. However, when a reader gets to the third chapter of Genesis, one finds death and disaster entering the scene. The first parents revolt and sin against their friendly, faithful, and loving God, who enjoyed walking with them every evening, thus forfeiting the Garden of Eden. A reader may wonder whether it would be the end of our history. If God has already foreseen a far better future, will Human faithlessness derail God's Plan? God enters the scene searching for the lost humanity, "Where are you? Why did you do such a thing?" (Gen 3:9, 13). There is pain and agony in the voice of God who dreamt a better world for the humans to live. Now, in the midst of their hard labor and sweat, pain and suffering God promises to continue to walk with them.

God will keep God's faith in Humans. Will human beings respond to God Equally?

After God's reconciliation with humanity, one may expect that things will move smoother. Nay, right in the next chapter, Cain murders his own brother Abel and thereby disrupting once again the onward march of history. There again, God intervenes asking, "Where is your brother Abel? What have you done! Listen: Your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil!" (Gen 4:9-10). Two major disasters right at the very beginning could have caused the end of human history; except that God would not allow the disruption of God's plan to march forward.

As we read further, the sixth chapter of Genesis shows, God regretting that he had created humans, for God saw how great was human's wickedness and how no desire that human heart conceived was ever anything but evil (Gen 6:6). It seems, as if in utter despair, God would resolve to wipe out the entire creation - not only humans, but also the beasts and the creeping things and the birds of the air (Gen 6:7). God sends the Great flood that drowned the earth for forty days and forty nights. But once again God's heart melts and by setting Noah and his family apart, God intervenes and saves the human race and the universe. God once again shows that God is Faithful to God's plan.

Now God chooses Abraham and through him begets a people for himself. The story of families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is a story of how God walked with them so closely that they even called him, "God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob." In the last chapter of Genesis, we get the summary of God's continuous interventions in spite of consistent wickedness and faithlessness of God's chosen people: Joseph who was sold as a slave by his own brothers tells them, "Even though you meant harm to me, God meant it for good, to achieve his present end, the survival of many people" (Gen 50:20).

The History of the faithless Israelites moves forward only by the faith of God. They get settled in Egypt and grow in large numbers only to be persecuted by the future Pharaoh. God again intervenes, listening to their cry (Exo 2:24), liberates them from the clutches of the wicked Pharaoh (Exo 15) and settles them in the land flowing with milk and honey (Deut 6:3; Jos 5:6). Even in the Land gifted by the Lord, they continue to be faithless and when God punishes them they would cry to

the Lord who would appoint judges to deliver and rule over them (Jdg 3:7-9; 6:1-2, 7-8; 13:1). The Lord appointed Kings and sent prophets repeatedly to warn and teach the people (2 Kgs 17:13). However, due to their hard heartedness they were exiled first by the Assyrians (2Kgs 17:6) and then by the king of Babylon (2 Kgs 24: 13-14). Once again when the people repented and cried to the Lord, God liberated them through Cyrus, the emperor of Persia and allowed them to return to their land (2 Chron 36:22-23).

In the letter to the Hebrews the author rightly points out, "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe" (Heb 1:1-2). The books of New Testament clearly point how in the last times God intervenes definitely through his own Son Jesus. Through his own life, passion, death and resurrection, Jesus saves the universe decisively, so that, our history may march towards the "New Heaven and New Earth" where there will not be night, sea, tears, and death. "For the Lord God shall be the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev 21:6). In the post Jesus Event, God continues to call men and women to carry this history towards the Omega point.

The overarching history of the Bible points to a deeply loving God who faithfully accompanies the vulnerable human beings in all their joys and sorrows, pleasures and pains. This God is Faithful and hopes that we actively believe in God's accompaniment till the New Heaven and Earth emerges.

The Second Reading

Actually there is no division called "The Historical books" either in the Hebrew Bible or in the Septuagint Bible. In 386 A.D., Cyril of Alexandria referred the books of Joshua to Second Kings as historical books. Within the Catholic tradition, 16 books of the Old Testament are placed under the historical category.³ These books are also divided under three traditions: Deuteronomistic history (Joshua to Esther), Chronnicler's history (1 & 2 Chron, Ezra and Nehemiah) and Maccabean history (1 & 2 Maccabees).

3 Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Maccabees.

Deuteronomistic history begins with how the Faithful God of Israel liberates the Israelites from the clutches of Egypt and helps them capture, divide and settle in the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. The Israelites, who were slaves for centuries needed a political formation to organize themselves into a nation. God presents them with variously gifted Judges, keeping in mind that they have to be responsive to the God who is Faithful to them. But Israelites could not handle their new found authority and freedom. As the author of Judges reports, "Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; they forgot the Lord, their God, and served the Baals and the Asherahs, and the anger of the Lord flared up against them. He sold them into the power of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Aram Naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim for eight years (Jdg 3:7-8)". However, God is Faithful and has visualized a plan wherein the people reach a destination incomparable to the present sufferings. Therefore, God does not lose heart and continues to form them. When the Israelites demand monarchy, God willingly offers them, but with enough caution as to how they could abuse the power to their own disadvantage (1 Sam 8:11-18).

Israelites proudly inaugurate their monarchy. Right from the beginning the hunger for border expansion and greed for economic supremacy makes them blind to their own internal balance and leads to greater inequality among the people of God. God's own inheritance begins to behave just like their oppressors Egypt in dealing with the poor and underprivileged, who are of their own making. In the midst of confusion and chaos, God does not lose sight of the end. God sends a series of prophets hoping God's people would see reason and turn back in repentance. However, the people were not willing to learn from their own blunders. The author of the Deuteronomistic History seems to be at a loss – Would the God who has been patient and faithful, abandon God's own people? The final chapters of 2 Kings show God unwillingly wanting to punish the people (2 Kgs 21:8-9; 22:16-17) and a slightest sign of their belief and repentance results in God's willingness to forgive (2 Kgs 22: 19-20; 23:25). In the end, the Deuteronomistic historian loses hope in his people and ends abruptly leaving, the king and people in the exile.

The Chronicler does not seem to agree with the abrupt negative ending of the Deuteronomistic historian. Therefore the historian reengages

in telling the history of the Faithful God and the Believing people in a positive way. The historian does it in a unique way by starting history, unlike the Deuteronomist, from the Creation of humans. The Chronicler historian is not scandalised by the first parents' sin or Cain and Abel's internal squabble leading to Abel's murder. Thus, the historian does not bother to mention sins and blunders but rather portrays how humanity continues to exist and flourish due to the faithfulness of God. Even the sin of King Saul is minimised (just two verses 1 Chron 10:13-14) and the Believing David's story gets fuller attention (1 Chron 11-29). King David, is portrayed as the forgiven sinner, who expresses his faith in God by wishing to build a temple, but humbly surrenders to the will of God that it would be built by Solomon, his son. However, due to the decadent kings who followed David and Solomon, the kingdom comes to its natural dissolution. The Chronicler historian tells us that the exile was only temporary and God in God's own everlasting faithfulness would re-establish the people – "All this was to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah: Until the land has retrieved its lost Sabbaths, during all the time it lies waste it shall have rest while seventy years are fulfilled (2 Chronicles 36:21)." Thus Chronicler ends the history with Cyrus, king of Persia's proclamation of the Israelites return to their Promised Land and rebuilding of the temple. Later the same historian would narrate how the Israelites returned and succeeded in rebuilding not only the temple but also their community centered around God. Thus the Chronicler positively portrays both the Faithful God and the Believing People, in his historiography.

Finally the Maccabean historian, locating the people of God in the midst of persecution from outside (1 Mac 1:20ff) and temptation to go astray from the Law from within (2 Mac 6), takes pains to assert that the people are authentically responding to God who is Faithful even at the cost of their own lives. The historian is neutral in presenting both brighter and darker sides of the peoples' faith. On the one hand, the Maccabean family headed by Mattathias aroused the spirit of entire Jerusalem in defense "of the Law and the covenant" (1 Mac 2:27), defiled the Law by entering into an alliance with the very gentile nations that defile the land (1 Mac 8) and accepting from their hands the seat of high priest though they did not belong to the family of Zadok (1 Mac 10). On the other hand, there were simple and authentic people like Eleazar (2 Mac 6) and a brave mother with valiant children (2 Mac 7) who were

Faithful to their God even at the cost of their own lives. The historian ends with an edifying story of how the people under the leadership of Judas, kept their faith in the God of their fathers even in the midst of the vilest of Nicanor's ploy to engage the Israelites in war on the Sabbath day hoping to defeat the Israelites. They believed that the Lord who sent his Angel in the days of King Hezekiah (2 Kgs 19) would save them against the blasphemous Nicanor (2 Mac 15:17-26). Thus the history of the People ends by showing both God as Faithful and the people as Believing.

Third Reading: Believing Rahab (Jos 2:9-13) and Achior (Judith 5:6-21)

I have taken two individuals - both are gentiles by origin, one female - Rahab, from the beginning of the historical books and Achior - a male, from one of the last of the historical books. While Rahab a Canaanite woman gives witness to the Faithfulness of God of Israel, Achior, an Ammonite man witnesses to the Believing community of Israel. I am intentionally bringing in the gentiles to show that the story of Faithful God and Believing people is not only an insider's point of view, but, attested by the outsiders too. In both these narratives my focus on the theological creed of these two individuals will highlight the consistent theme of the Faithful God and the Believing people.

a. Faithful God of Believing Rahab

The multitude of Israelites under the leadership of Joshua camping in Shittim are preparing to occupy the land of Jericho. As the first step, Joshua sends two spies to explore the land and the people (Jos 2:1). The spies come into Jericho and enter the house of Rahab, who hides them in her attic. Meanwhile, the entry of the spies is reported to the king of Jericho. The king sets up a counter-surveillance team to find them. When the officers of the king come to the house of Rahab to enquire about the spies, she intelligently misleads them. After sending the officers, she comes to the Israelite spies to bargain for her and her house-hold's safety.

Rahab's confession of faith begins with the confident assertion "I know" (v. 9), and comes to a climax with the affirmation "The Lord your God ... is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (v. 11).⁴

4 Hamlin, E. J. (1983). *Inheriting the Land: A Commentary on the Book of Joshua*.

Her conviction that the Lord has handed over the land of Jericho is only a reaffirmation of what the narrator has already revealed (Jos 1:2-3, 11, 15). God was characterised “in heaven above and on earth below” by Moses himself (Deut 4:39). However, there are three important elements in Rahab’s confessions: First, Rahab affirms that Israel’s God has power over the realms of the heavens and the earth which is the domain of many of the gods that her people worship (Exo 23:24, 32–33; 34:15; Deut 11:16, 28; 12:2–3, 30–31). She is affirming that Israel’s God rules over the very heavens and earth that her own religious traditions assert belongs to various other gods and goddesses. Secondly, when Rahab says that “Yahweh your God is God,” she is stating that Baal, Asherah, and the rest are not true gods. This affirmation echoes a similar language found several times in the Pentateuch, where God’s exclusive claims to sovereignty (Deut 4:35; 10:17) or revelations about his character (Deut 7:9; 10:17) are found. Thirdly, Rahab’s words become even more significant when we realize that the last part of her affirmation—the phrase “in the heavens above and the earth below”—is found only three times prior to this, all in contexts that affirm God’s exclusive claims to sovereignty (Exo 20:4; Deut 4:39; 5:8). Thus, Rahab is doing far more than merely trying to save her skin or that of her family. She is acknowledging that this God is the one and only true God, the only one, who is worthy of worship and allegiance.⁵

Rahab also rightly reports to the spies the present psychological situation of the people and king – “a dread of you has come upon us and all the inhabitants of the land are overcome with fear of you (2:9) We are disheartened; everyone is discouraged because of you (2:11). She speaks of the dread that has fallen upon Canaan’s inhabitants. Her words are the reflection of the great victory song of the Israelites: “The peoples heard and quaked; anguish gripped the dwellers in Philistia. Then were the chieftains of Edom dismayed, the nobles of Moab seized by trembling;

International Theological Commentary (18). Grand Rapids, Mich.; Edinburgh [Lothian: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Handsel Press.

5 Howard, D. M., Jr. (2001, c1998). *Vol. 5: Joshua* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (103). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

All the inhabitants of Canaan melted away;" (Exo 15:14-15); "I will have the terror of me precede you, so that I will throw into panic every nation you reach. I will make all your enemies turn from you in flight;" (Exo 23:27). The Canaanites are portrayed as having *lost heart* (lit. "been seized with anxiety"). Dread accompanies God's march through the world on behalf of God's people (Jos 4:24; 5:1).⁶ Her descriptive and well-informed psychological situation of the People of Jericho points to the fact that they cannot go against the God who is favouring the Israelites.

Rahab's confession of Yahweh as God and description of the dread of the people of Jericho are based on two historical events in the surrounding nations. The first and the foundational event was how Yahweh God dried the Red sea and the second was how the Amorite kings were doomed to death (2:10). Exodus 14, describes the event of crossing the sea. Desiring to teach, both Pharaoh and the Israelites that Yahweh is supreme, Yahweh ordered the people to take a U-turn which would lead them to the edge of the Red sea. In the meanwhile, Pharaoh would learn about the people's wandering and pursue them once again. The Pharaoh with his choicest 600 horses and horsemen and the best of the foot soldiers marched forward, closing in on the cornered Israelites who were sandwiched between the Pharaoh and the deep Red Sea. When the frightened people complained to Moses bitterly, he replied to them: "Do not fear! Stand your ground and see the victory the Lord will win for you today. For these Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. (Exodus 14:13). What happened in the following moments became an unforgettable Event for the Israelites. The Israelites could not think nor dream how their God would save them. However, they only had to commit themselves unto this God and say "Amen". In their memory and history it became an unforgettable Event. God in an unthinkable way dried the sea and paved a path for God's people. God, through Moses had promised to save them and God was Faithful to his word.

The second event that Rahab narrates is how God cleared the way, for the marching Israelites coming out of Egypt, by putting to sword the Amorite kings Sihon and Og (Num 21:21-35). This mighty act of God in the history of his people has two immediate results. Future opponents are afraid. The Intelligent ones confess Yahweh, the God of Israel, as God of heaven and earth. Both the kings obstructed the onward

6 Woudstra, M. H. (1981). *The Book of Joshua*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (71). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

march of the people of God in spite of their pleas for a peaceful passage. While the text reports the defeat of Sihon in simple terms, it dramatizes the event with Og. For, Og might have heard already how Sihon was defeated for his unwillingness to give passage, yet remained stubborn. Therefore, the Lord said to Moses: "Do not fear him; for into your hand I deliver him with all his forces and his land. You will do to him as you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon" (Num 21:34). It was not the strength of Joshua and his army that they defeated these two kings, but only the initiative and the might of the God who supported the Israelites. Therefore, this event is one of the mighty works of the Faithful God of Israel.

Though Rahab was a gentile, she could recognize **the Faithful God of Israel**, articulate it and declare it to the Israelites themselves. It was only on account of this Faithful God did she accord hospitality to the two Israelite spies. Therefore, when she requested them, "Now then, swear to me by the Lord that, since I am showing kindness to you, you in turn will show kindness to my family. Give me a reliable sign (Joshua 2:12)," – it has to be understood as, just as your God is Faithful to you the Believing people, so also be Faithful to me. Thus, the spies in turn respond, "We pledge our lives for yours, if you do not betray our mission, we **will be Faithful** in showing kindness to you when the Lord gives us the land." (Jos 2:14).

b. Achor: Became a Believer for having Proclaimed about the Believing People

Achor is an Ammonite mercenary working in the army of Holofernes, one of the mightiest generals of Nebuchadnezzar. The king had commissioned Holofernes to occupy and bring to submission the western regions, including Judea. When the Israelites heard of Holofernes, they purified themselves and prayed with great fervour and did penance (Judith 4:9). When Holofernes was told that the Israelites were ready for battle, in great anger he summoned the officers. During the consultation Achior told Holofernes and his army about the character of the Israelites and their God.

Achior, the mercenary leader of the Ammonites, took his stand before the angry Holofernes and his army, made a solemn declaration concerning the people against whom his master and lord wished to wage war. He declared that the Israelites once lived in Mesopotamia. Since

they acknowledged the divine worship of “the God of heaven” (Judith 5:8), they were driven out of the land. On account of their belief in their God, they settled in the land of Canaan and became very rich. However, due to famine, they were forced to migrate to Egypt where they “grew into such a great multitude that the number of their race could not be counted” (Judith 5:10). Once again they became a victim of the jealous pharaoh who persecuted them bitterly. The Israelites appealed to their God, who struck the pharaoh and his army with plagues. Finally when the Egyptians expelled the Israelites from their land, their God brought them out of Egypt, even drying up the Red Sea and settled them in the land of Amorites. Achior concluded by saying that these Israelites cannot be defeated. Only if they themselves rebel and sin against their God, then will their God abandon them into the hands of their enemies, otherwise, their God would shield them (5:17-21). When Holofernes heard the declaration of Achior, he bound him and ordered him to be thrown into the camp of the Israelites, hoping they will kill him or when Holofernes enters victoriously he himself would slaughter him. On the other hand, finding Achior, and having heard what he had to say, the whole assembly of Israel “fell prostrate and worshipped God” (6:18). It is reported that later he became a proselyte, was circumcised, and joined Israel (Judith 14).

First observation is that the character Achior is similar to “the profile figure of the celebrated Ahikar,” a famous pagan wise man who was an advisor to the Assyrian kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon and was the reputed author of a wisdom book containing a number of proverbs and fables.⁷ Ahikar is, in principle, a good and just pagan who submits to the proven injustices on the part of the great of this world”⁸ The author of the book of Judith would have made sure that the confession concerning the Faithful God and the Believing people was reported by a wise pagan so as to draw the attention of the reader.

The second observation is on the historical accuracy of the narrative of Achior. Definitely the narrative has no accuracy.⁹ However, we are not looking for historical facts, but theological content of the narration. For Holofernes and his officers, strength and might were to be measured in material terms of size and numbers, of organization and armies (5: 3, 23).

7 Moore, C. A. (2008). *Judith: A new translation with introduction and commentary*. (162). New Haven; London: Yale University Press.

8 E. G. Kraeling, “Book of Ahikar,” *IDB*, I, 132ff.

For the Jews, strength and might were rooted in an exclusive faithfulness to God (vv 7–9, 19) and righteous living (5: 17–18, 20–21). Later Judith herself will refer to the speech of Achior and say to Holofernes, “So then, my lord and master, do not disregard his word, but bear it in mind, for it is true. Indeed our people are not punished, nor does the sword prevail against them, except when they sin against their God” (Judith 11:10). Then she goes on to mislead him as to how the Israelites have sinned and how she will be an instrument to bring their doom through him. The reader will see the irony and know for whom is she an instrument of doom. It is clear that the Israelites have not sinned nor rebelled against their God, but have devoutly put their trust in their God.

The third and final observation is that Achior reported to Holofernes and his army about the Israelites, as a servant desiring to give a good advice to his master. However, Achior was misunderstood and thrown into the camp of Israelites, with a view, that the Israelites would kill him or later Holofernes would do the same after marching victoriously into Israelites’ camp. On the other hand, the Israelites liberated Achior and respectfully brought him in front of their assembly and patiently listened to him. When they heard from their own enemy about their God’s mighty acts, and their continued trust in God, were only further boosted. From now on Achior has become an insider to the history of Israelites. He witnesses how the Faithful and the Believing people relate with each other. “Now Achior, seeing all that the God of Israel had done, **believed firmly in God**” (Judith 14:10).

In conclusion, as we reread the Bible from three different perspectives, we find that the God of Israel is Faithful and this God’s fidelity invites the Israelites in turn to be Believing people. Though they sin and turn away from their God, the Faithful God intervenes to continue to take the march to final destination. Let this march with God continue and let us be part of this onward journey.

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9 For detailed errors refer to Moore, C.A. (2008). Judith. (161).

Revelation and Faith in Marcan Perspective

Scaria Kuthirakkattel

The author is a retired professor of New Testament at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. After an introduction the author systematically studies Mk 1:14-15. This text is then situated in the context of the entire Gospel. Finally some salient features of faith in Mark are highlighted.

Introduction

Every religious tradition begins with a profound experience of the Ineffable Mystery that we call God. The Christian tradition also begins with such an experience, namely, Jesus' experience of God as an intimately loving parent.¹ Deep religious experiences cannot be defined, not even adequately described. But they can be expressed, though inadequately, in and through symbols. The Gospel according to John expresses Jesus' intimate, personal experience of God by means of the symbol: Father-Son Relationship. To be more precise, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who reveals the Father. In the synoptic Gospels, however, Jesus' experience of God as an intimately loving parent² is expressed by means of another symbol: the Reign of God.³

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1. Cf. George M. Soares Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus" ' in: *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action* (ed. Scaria Kuthirakkattel; Pune: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2003), 3.
 2. It probably occurred during Jesus' baptism (Mk1:9 and par) and its meaning and significance are communicated according to the paradigm of theophany (Mk1:10-11 and par)
 3. I prefer the expression, 'Reign of God' rather than 'Kingdom of God' because 'Kingdom' has a political, colonial overtone and it has also geographical and territorial

The Reign of God is a global expression for the sum total of eschatological salvation. It is relational and experiential ... Jesus never attempts to define it. Instead he explains it in metaphors, parables and short sayings, offers a personal and experiential insight into this polyvalent symbol and enables people to experience it personally.⁴

Each of the synoptic Gospels articulates and develops this symbol⁵ in a unique way.⁶

The Gospel according to Mark – the subject of this article – develops this symbol in depth and with clarity in Mk 1:14-15. These two verses are generally considered the programmatic summary of the entire Gospel. This programmatic summary highlights the symbol, the Reign of God,⁷

connotation. On the other hand 'Reign' implies an activity and it does not have the overtones and connotations noted above.

4. Scaria Kuthirakkattel, *The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry according to Mark's Gospel (1:14-3:6): A Redaction Critical Study* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1990), 97.
5. On symbols and symbolic interpretation see in Scaria Kuthirakkattel, "Symbols and Sacraments in the Fourth Gospel", in: *The World as Sacrament* (ed. Francis D'Sa et alli; Pune. Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1998), 74-79.
6. Mt 5:17-20 is the key text and it is programmatic. What precedes leads to 5:17-20. This is particularly true of 2:1-23 which recalls the tradition of Moses and the patriarchs. Mt 4:1-11 narrates Jesus' temptation wherein, unlike Israel he overcomes the temptation. The theme, Reign of God, mentioned in 4:17 is interpreted in 5:17-20 from the Matthean perspective. What follows is the proclamation of the Reign of God by Jesus and his disciples (5:21-10:42) which is rejected by Jews and the leaders (11:1-13:58). This paves the way for ushering the Reign of God from Christian perspective (14:1-20:34). The proclamation of the Reign of God leads him to confrontation with Jewish leaders on one side and clarifying the Christian perspectives on the other (21:1-25:46). Finally the Passion, death and resurrection function as the climax of the proclamation of the Reign of God (26:1-28:20). Lk 4:16-30, the key text in the third Gospel focuses on Jesus, the Prophet and His universal mission to the oppressed. This text is a summary of the whole Gospel: Acceptance (4:16-22), confrontation (4:23-28), plot to kill (4:29) and the miraculous escape alludes to Resurrection and Ascension (4:30). It also contains the main Lucan themes.
7. The expression 'Reign of God' is not frequent or significant in the OT except in the book of Daniel. In the NT it occurs mainly in the synoptic Gospels and in Jesus' lips. It very likely originated with Jesus.

and emphasizes the response expected from humans, namely, faith in Jesus Christ. So we deal with these two verses.

I. Mk1:14-15 in Focus

We shall focus on these two verses in two steps: the structure and meaning of 1:14-15 (a) and situating the text in the context of the entire Gospel (b).

a. *The Structure and Meaning of Mk 1:14-15*

The text consists of an introduction (1:14) and the content of the proclamation (1:15). The introduction has a theologically nuanced time-frame (after John was arrested⁸), the place where Jesus ministers (Jesus came to Galilee) and the modality (proclaiming the gospel⁹ of God). The content of the gospel of God is clearly elucidated in two synonymously parallel statements in the indicative mood (1:15ab) and two synonymously parallel summons in the imperative mood (1:15cd) as shown below.

The salvific time (*kairos*¹⁰) is fulfilled (1:15a),
and the Reign of God has come near (1:15b);

repent (1:15c)
and believe in Jesus Christ¹¹ (1:15d).

The Greek word *kairos* means “the particular time determined by God for the commencement, for the eschatological salvation in and through

8. The Greek verb *paradidonai* is used technically for delivering up someone as a prisoner. The LXX uses it for the fate of the prophets. The early Church used it for the handing over of Jesus (cf Acts 3:13, Rom 4:25; 8:32, I Cor 11:23; Eph 5:2, 25). Mark uses it to describe the fate of Jesus (14:11, 18:21, 42, 44) and of John the Baptist (1:14).
9. The Greek word *euangelion* is technical for the news of victory, often in a battle. In Roman times it was used for the good news of the birth of an heir of Caesar or the accession of Caesar to the throne. In the NT it is used mainly by Paul for whom the main content of *euangelion* is Jesus' saving Death and Resurrection (cf I Cor 15:3-5).
10. The Greek noun *chronos* means time in the ordinary sense of the word whereas *kairos* means salvific time.
11. The word *euangelion* is identified with Jesus (cf 8:38; 10:29).

the ministry of the Messiah".¹² And by virtue of the synonymous parallelism between 1:15a and 1:15b, the second member explicates the first. Therefore, a fulfillment of the salvific time takes place in Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of God.

As noted earlier, the Reign of God is a symbol common to the synoptic Gospels. However Mark has highlighted specific features in his understanding of the symbol, the Reign of God. In the first place, Jesus ushers in the Reign of God through his deeds and words. Of particular significance are the deeds of wonder:¹³ exorcisms and healings, power over nature and resuscitation. By his exorcisms and healings he wages the eschatological battle against the Reign of Satan¹⁴ who according to the opinion of Jesus' contemporaries is the archenemy of God's Reign. Secondly, the main content of the gospel (*euangelion*) proclaimed by Jesus is the Reign of God; thus Mark shows the continuity between Jesus' preaching and the preaching of the early Church. Finally, Mark closely associates the reign of God and the person of Jesus¹⁵. Therefore, although the Reign of God is basically theocentric it is also Christocentric. Jesus is thus not only the herald of God's Reign but also it's content.

The irruption of God's Reign (God's definitive revelation) demands decisive and unconditional response from humans. This demand is expressed by means of a pair of synonymously parallel imperatives (1:15cd). As in the case 1:15ab, in this instance too, the second explicates the first. The verb *metanoein* "on the whole means the profound and personal conversion to God as accentuated by the prophets."¹⁶ By virtue of the synonymous parallelism conversion has a Christological focus, namely, conversion (1:15c) consists in believing in Jesus Christ (1:15d).

12. Scaria Kuthirakkattel, *The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry*, 94.

13. I prefer the word 'wonder' rather than 'miracle' because a 'miracle' is considered to be against the laws of nature.

14. Cf Mk 3:22-27; 1:24-27; 5:2-9.

15. For Mark the mystery of the kingdom is the person of Jesus (4:11) in contrast with Mt 13:11 and Lk 8:10.

16. Scaria Kuthirakkattel, *The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry*, 99.

In brief, therefore, the definitive disclosure of the God's saving plan (the Reign of God) requires faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

b. Situating Mk 1:14-15 in Context

Mark 1:14-15 could be viewed as point of arrival of what precedes and the point of departure of all that follow. This perspective can be schematically depicted as follows.

Flashback ← Mk1:14-15 → Flashforward
(1:1-13) (1:16-16:8)

1. Flashback (1:1-13)

Mk 1:1 is commonly held to be the title of the entire Gospel. Therefore what falls under the purview of flashback pertains to 1:2-13. Verses 2-3 consist of two quotations from the prophetic literature (respectively Mal 3:1 and Is 40:3) which announce the preparatory activities for the manifestation of the Messiah. And John the Baptist proclaiming a baptism for the forgiveness of sins (1:4) and people's responding to John the Baptist's summons by undergoing baptism (1:5) fulfill the prophetic perspective. His clothing and diet (1:6) allude to Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), the expected forerunner of the Messiah.

John the Baptist's continual, repeated proclamation stresses the superiority of the one who comes after him from the perspective of strength,¹⁷ dignity,¹⁸ and mode of activity¹⁹ (1:7-8). Jesus, even though sinless,²⁰ identifies himself with sinners by undergoing baptism (1:9). Jesus' baptism occasions a theophany in which he is anointed by the Holy Spirit for the Messianic mission (1:10-11): not as the glorious king (Ps 2:7) but as the suffering servant (Is 42:1). This is followed by the

17. The adjective 'mightier' probably refers to Jesus' power to exorcise (cf 3:27) whereas there is no evidence that John the Baptist ever performed exorcism.

18. Not a Jewish but only a Gentile slave was expected to stoop down and untie the thong of the master's sandals.

19. John the Baptist baptizes with water but Jesus ushers in the Holy Spirit.

20. Jesus' sinlessness is affirmed in various NT books (cf Jn 8:46; II Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; I pet 2:22).

scene of Jesus' temptation; he unlike Israel overcomes the temptation (1:12-13).

Thus John the Baptist's ministry and the initial preparatory activities (baptism and temptation in which Jesus is acted upon²¹) equipped him to commence his ministry with a bang. And this commencement of his ministry is narrated in the programmatic summary (1:14-15).

2. *Flashforward (1:16-16:8)*

The unfolding of God's Reign proclaimed by Jesus (1:15ab) and the response to the disclosure as faith in Jesus Christ (1:15cd) steadily progresses in the Gospel in two stages: 1:16-8:30 and 8:27-16-28.²² And this we shall develop in the second part of the article.

II. Revelation and Faith in Mk 1:16-16:8

a. *Revelation and Faith in Mk 1:16-8:30*

The call to be partners in Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of God and the initial response in faith (1:16-20) are cemented in the appointment of the disciples as Jesus' ambassadors (3:13-19) and in their execution of the given mandate (6:6b-13). Jesus' eschatological battle against Satan and his/her allies signal definitive victory over evil forces as a class (1:23-26).²³ In his teaching, characterized with authority and eschatological newness,²⁴ he discloses himself. To this disclosure the audience respond with astonishment and fear (1:22, 27) – both typical of initial faith.

Jesus responds magnanimously to people's faith (2:5) and ensures forgiveness of sins (2:8-11). Although these acts are viewed as blasphemous by religious fundamentalists (2:6-7), Jesus goes a step further by dining with tax collectors who were considered sinners by the

21. Jn 1:9-13 only two activities (coming from Nazareth and coming out of the water) are predicted of Jesus. In all the other instances he is acted upon.

22. Cf Scaria Kuthirakkattel, *'The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry*, 37-60.

23. Note the plural (us) in 1:24 although the context would have required only singular (Cf 1:23).

24. The adjective *kainos* (in contrast with *neos*) has uneschatalogical content.

self-righteous scribes (2:15-16) and he solemnly declares that his mission is precisely to call the socially oppressed sisters and brothers into fellowship with God (2:17). His exercise of authority over the Sabbath (2:23-28) and its concrete implementation (3:1-5) climax in Pharisees' stubborn refusal to believe in him (3:6).

Theological fundamentalism of the scribes during Jesus' time and of the Christian theologians of the present constitutes perennial block in one's openness to God (3:20-30). Being biologically related to Jesus (3:21) or being born into a Christian family does not guarantee authentic relation with Jesus (3:31-35). Likewise peripheral and the superficial understanding of Jesus does not lead one to personal rapport with Jesus in faith (6:1-6a). The emphasis on ritual purity of the Pharisees and the excessive stubborn adherence to rubrics and tradition of some Christian leaders hamper genuine growth in faith and true religiosity.

Jesus' disclosure of himself to his disciples by multiplying the five loaves of bread and two fish for the Jewish audience (6:34-44) and the same for the Gentile audience (8:1-9) challenge us to break the barriers based on caste, gender, religion, etc.

Despite the call, commission and mission of the disciples /apostles and the privileged self-disclosure to them (4:35-41; 6:45-52) they lacked faith (4:41; 8:14-21). The same may be true of us who are ordained and commissioned to mission. The ongoing self-assessment of one's faith is absolutely necessary to grow in faith (8:14-21).

b. Revelation and Faith in Mk 8:27-16:8

The main thrust of 1:16-8:30 was the identity of Jesus: who is Jesus? Various characters of the narrative in 1:16-8:30 responded to this question in very different ways: the scribes very aggressively, common people open to Jesus, the people of his village very superficially. But Jesus' primary concern was to elicit faith from the disciples. And the acknowledgement of their faith occurs in 8:29: "You are the Messiah". But this acknowledgement could be misleading because the mind-set and the hearts' longing of the Jews were that of a glorious Messiah (2 Sam 7:12-17). Therefore in 8:27-16:8 the author stresses that Jesus is

not the glorious but the suffering Messiah. This perspective is highlighted in various ways: scriptural necessity²⁵, by means of theological passive (9:31; 10:33) and, above all, by highlighting the contrast between the human will and God's will (8:33; 14:36).

The faith response of the disciples is very disappointing. In spite of repeated questions and even censure (8:33), they were unable to follow Jesus, the suffering Messiah. So when Jesus predicts that he is going to be suffering Messiah, Peter rebukes Jesus (8:32). This perspective is disclosed 8:27-16:8.

Jesus by all means (*dei*) will be the suffering Messiah (8:31) and consequently a true follower of Jesus must be ready to die for his faith in Jesus (8:34-38). But Suffering and Death constitute only one side of the Paschal Mystery, there is also the glorious dimension (9:2-8). This two dimensional perspective was already articulated in 1 Cor 15:3-5 which is a creedal formula.

The craze for greatness and privileged position conflict with Jesus' emphasis on service (9:33-37; 10:35-44) to the point of giving up one's life for others (10:45). Jesus' prophetic gesture of cleansing the temple and spelling out its purpose as a place of worship (11:15-17) did not evoke faith but hatred (11:18).

In the context of sharing the Passover meal the incredulity of Judas (14:19-21) and Peter (14:29-31) and the fear of the rest of the disciples (14:27) become evident. The scene of Gethsemane where Jesus surrenders himself to God's will, the chosen apostles steadily grow in their spiritual blindness.²⁶ The betrayal by Judas (14:45) denial by Peter (14:66-72) and the flight of the rest seal the incredulity of the apostles.

In brief, therefore, the faith of the disciples steadily decline and finally vanish in 8:27-16:8.

III. Salient Features of Faith

Now we focus our attention on certain specific features of faith in the Gospel according to Mark.

25. Cf Mk 9:12, 13, 14, 21, 27, 49.

26. Note the progression: they were sleeping (14:37) '!' their eyes were heavy (14:40)

In the first place, faith is a gift. This perspective is highlighted in 8:22-26 and 8:27-30. The blind man is enabled to see things clearly just as the disciples would be enabled to move from popular perception about Jesus to a faith perception

The progressive healing of the blind man symbolizes the spiritual enlightenment of the disciples, their transition from blindness (cf 18:17-18) to faith in Jesus, the Messiah.²⁷

Secondly, Mark highlights the relation between experience and faith. This is particularly true in the cleansing of the leper (1:40-45), resuscitation of Jairus' daughter (5:33-43), the cure of a deaf and dumb man (7:31-37) and the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26).²⁸ Their profound experience empowers them not only to gain health and life but also to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. For according to Is 35:5-6 when the Messiah comes the lepers would be cleansed, deaf hear, dumb speak, the blind gain sight and the dead are raised to life.

Thirdly, women stand out as bearers of faith. The faith of the woman suffering from hemorrhage said: "If I touch his clothes, I will be made well." (5:28). Her intensive faith is beyond description. So also the faith of the Syrophoenician woman who lowered herself so humbly that her request was readily granted (7:28-30). The loving faith of the sinful woman (14:3-9) stands out against the plotting Jewish authorities (14:1-2) and the betraying apostle (14:10-11).

Fourthly, attachment to riches is a hindrance to faith because one becomes insensitive to the needy and faithless in relation to God (10:17-22).

Finally, the specific confession that a believer should make is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (1:1): the first occurs in Peter's acknowledgement of Jesus as the Messiah (8:29) and the second in the centurion's confession that Jesus is the Son of God (15:39).

27. Scaria Kuthirakkattel, *'The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry*, 51.

28. Note that Mk 7:31-37 and 8:20-26 have no parallels in Mathew and Luke.

Conclusion

We conclude this article with the following statements:

1. In the Gospel according to Mark the response to the inauguration of God's Reign is faith in Jesus.
2. In ushering in the Reign of God in word and deed faith in various shades and intensities does occur. But there is also refusal to respond to God's Reign, namely, incredulity.
3. Experience and faith and women's faith are highlighted by the evangelist.
4. One is called to express one's faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

Faith that Engenders Hope and Audacity

Images from the Annals of the Early Church

Thomas Malipurathu

Here the author believes that an observance such as "The Year of Faith" must serve us as an occasion for taking a closer look at our life of faith as Christians. This can best be done by juxtaposing the lights and shadows of our own faith commitment with some of the models of faith-life which the New Testament witnesses place before us. The book of Acts and the great array of persons and situations it showcases are particularly relevant in this context. This paper tries to subject a few such models portrayed in the earliest stage of the Church's history to a closer scrutiny. The hope is that such a study will provide impulses helping us to formulate clearer options when it comes to the day-to-day living of our faith.

1 New Testament Perspectives on Faith

Scholars working on delineating the growth-trajectory of the concept of faith in the New Testament are unlikely to find the Lucan writings (The Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles)¹ a particularly helpful source. If they, on the other hand, focus their attention on such redoubtable sources as the Pauline corpus, the Gospel of John²,

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- 1 There is now near unanimity among New Testament scholars that the two books, the third Gospel and Acts, come from the same author. The discussion in this paper presupposes that as a consensus position.
 - 2 The Fourth Gospel, although it contains historical traditions of much value, is admittedly less reliable than the Synoptics as a historical source; cf. George M.

the Letter to the Hebrews or the Letter of James, they might find themselves on surer, more rewarding ground. Nevertheless, the Third Gospel, like the other two Synoptics, does record in considerable detail the immensely significant foundational experience (i.e., the faith-experience of the apostolic community) which entailed the Christian faith in all its rich and multifaceted unfolding.

A majority of modern critical New Testament scholars believes that the early tradition of the sayings of Jesus had been redacted in diverse degrees by the evangelists from a post-Easter perspective³. Jesus' own preaching calling for faith in God and not belief in himself was certainly reinvented by the evangelists to introduce the idea of faith in the person of Jesus. Of course, that is not to discount the fact that the nuances of this assertion have been a subject of raging debate for well over two hundred years with nothing like a consensus emerging as yet. The core of the contention is the question of interpreting the relationship between faith as proclaimed by Jesus and the faith in Christ which became the sum and substance of the Church's kerygma.

Jesus' invitation to faith was built on the infinite possibility given to the one who trusts in God by placing his or her full trust in God to overcome all hurdles in life. In that sense faith is equivalent to an unqualified trust in the goodness of God and God's unlimited power as creator. It is this kind of a disposition that Jesus repeatedly refers to in the miracle stories reported in the Synoptic Gospels. Thus we have Jesus saying to the blind Bartimaeus: "Go; your faith has saved you" (Mk 10:52). To the centurion who seeks Jesus' intervention for his servant, Jesus' assurance is: "Go; let it be done to you according to your faith" (Mt 8:13). In the

SOARES-PRABHU, "Jesus the Teacher: The Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus of Nazareth," in Francis X. D'SA (ed.), *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective* " [Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, Vol. IV] (Pune: Jnana-deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, 2001), 252. Yet its genre and the relatively late date of composition ensure that it contains more advanced reflections on the question of faith.

- 3 For a more elaborate consideration of the following points, cf. Brevard S. CHILDS, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 601-613.

Lucan version of the same story Jesus remarks: "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Lk 7:9). As a matter of fact, we can say that those who transmitted the Synoptic tradition to us were primarily motivated by the desire to let the future generations confront the message of Jesus like his first disciples did when they received the call to repent and believe in the unlimited power of a caring God.

The early Church lived in the firm conviction that Jesus was not simply a Jewish rabbi, but a unique servant of God through whom faith in God was awakened and channelled. Moreover, it believed that the event of Jesus' resurrection had such a crucial significance in so far as belief in God was now anchored to faith in God's raising of Christ from the dead. Indeed the confession of this truth would become an essential prerequisite for admission to the community (cf. Acts 2:36, 44). It is against this background that Paul declares unabashedly: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9).

Paul's own faith was evidently built on the foundation of his experience of the risen Christ and, unlike the Twelve, he never met the earthly Jesus in person. For Paul the absolute highpoint of his life was that sensational encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. Naturally he sees the resurrected Christ as the foundation of the Christian faith as well. He uses a variety of expressions to indicate Christian existence in a religious context: "having faith" (Rom 14:22); "being in faith" (2 Cor 13:5); "standing firm in faith" (1 Cor 16:13). He sets forth in great detail the content of faith especially in Romans and Galatians. Indeed, God's raising Christ from the dead constitutes the kernel of Paul's proclamation—the Christian kerygma (cf. 1 Cor 15:14; Rom 16:25). Paul would consider the acceptance of the kerygma as faith, but not in the sense of giving intellectual assent to a series of propositional truths. It would rather mean to be seized by an act of God which became manifest in God's raising of Christ from the dead. In this sense we can say that the emphasis of faith for Paul lies not on the act of believing but on the subject-matter of belief.

The contrast that Paul posits between faith and works has been the subject of much stormy debate among New Testament scholars. By focusing on Gen 15:6 ("And he believed in the LORD; and the LORD

reckoned it to him as righteousness”) Paul proposes a stark contrast between justification by faith and justification through the works of the law. His assertion on the matter leaves no room for doubt: “But to one who without works trusts in him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness” (Rom 4:5). He makes it even more clear in Galatians: “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’” (Gal 3:11). But one has to understand that the Pauline polarity is not between faith and works pure and simple. There is a theological vision undergirding his stance on the matter. He seems to underscore the fact that God’s intention of restoring humankind through reconciliation is accomplished not within the framework of Torah, but it has been achieved through the decisive act of God manifested through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Faith is central to the theological vision of the evangelist John. His clear statement about the purpose of his composition confirms this fact: “But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:31). Notably, when compared to the Synoptics, the frequency of the use of the verb “to believe” (*pisteuein*) is considerably high in John. It occurs 98 times in the Fourth Gospel (as against Mt – 11x; Mk – 14x; Lk – 9x). The verb is used most often to indicate belief in Jesus, especially to believe that Jesus is sent by God (cf. 5:24; 10:37). He presents an array of witnesses bearing testimony to the fact that Jesus was sent by God: Nathaniel (1:50); the Samaritans (4:42); the blind man (9:35-38) and Thomas (20:29). Furthermore, in John the miracles are meant to be “signs” (*semeia*) pointing to the true identity of Jesus. The appropriate response to knowing the identity of Jesus is believing in him. Such faith is life-giving, the evangelist avers. Whereas Paul speaks of faith leading to “righteousness”, John speaks of “life” as the fruit of faith.

The concept of faith in the Letter to the Hebrews has to be understood against the background of the situation of the community of its addressees. They were beset by doubt and insecurity. The author is urging the congregation to assume the attitude of steadfastly holding on to their faith by reaffirming hope in the invisible power of God. Interestingly the theme of faith appears in the paranetic parts of the

Letter (3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:20; 10:19-13:17) and not in the doctrinal sections. From the definition of faith which the author offers in 11:1 ("Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen") we can say that his understanding of faith is closely linked to hope. Christ as the high priest and mediator of a new covenant (9:15) was the first who had reached the promise of the faith and consequently he becomes the guarantor of the same path which Christians have to follow.

The Letter of James is often discussed for the apparent contradiction of Paul that it seems to propose. But in reality James is not directly debating with Paul on the question of polarity between faith and works. His position was that the Christians cannot assume a stand that would separate faith completely from works. What James objects with obvious vehemence is the kind of faith that lends itself to indifference, faith that is callous and insensitive towards one's needy neighbour. This is expressed with trenchant clarity in Jas 2:15-17: "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

Indeed that understanding of faith seems to lie at the heart of the Lucan writings as well. An active concern for one's neighbour, which the Third Gospel and Acts seem to propose as the highest expression of true religiosity, proceeds directly from an unwavering faith. A striking illustration of this can be seen as emerging from what is arguably the best known among Luke's unique parables: the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). The parable itself is occasioned by a sneaky lawyer's loaded question: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" In the ensuing conversation he sums up the essence of religiosity in terms of the *Shema* (Deut 6:5), which expresses the core of Israel's faith⁴. To this he adds the love of neighbour command stipulated in Lev 19:18. It would appear that the lawyer is concerned about the right mode of practising one's faith⁵. Jesus' answer articulated through the parable makes it irrefutably

4 This was a passage fundamental to Jewish life and worship in the home, the synagogue and the temple.

5 The lawyer's query is as to what he must do —what conditions he must meet—to be able to inherit eternal life. The question may be directly linked to the axiomatic

clear that the genuine living of faith is through the practice of an active concern for one's needy neighbour.

Along with the other evangelists Luke emphasizes faith as a premier virtue in the Christian context. But in one remarkable aspect he stands out among the four evangelists. Among them it is he alone who decided to write a sequel to the story of Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles. In other words, he wanted to show how the precious gift of faith which the Apostles and early disciples received from Jesus was lived out in the concrete circumstances of their day-to-day life. In fact, Acts brings alive to us selected moments of the early Church's enthusiastic and unrelenting efforts to give an increasingly fuller expression to their faith. This endeavour of theirs in turn was marked by two sterling qualities: audacity and hope. The rest of this paper is an elaboration of this observation.

2 Hope-inspiring Faith

A closer look at the early part of the Acts narrative helps us to conclude that the tiny band of Jesus' early followers were radically transformed by the experience of the Resurrection. One of the ways this transformation manifested itself was the manner in which a splendidly vivid hope became part of their daily life. Their horizons, darkened by the turn of recent events, instantly became notably luminous. Much of their enthusiasm to wholly internalize the Lord's call to transform themselves into his gutsy witnesses till the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) was a consequence of this newly acquired hope. In our own age, the loss of hope and the menacing spread of social discontent is perhaps the most ominous development. A million forces are relentlessly at work to stimulate and sustain - to use the chilling phrase of Pope John Paul II -

connection between obedience to the law and inheritance or life that is established in Deut 6:16-25. The repeated reference to the verb "do" (*poiein*) is of special relevance here (vv. 25.28.37). In the monotheistic faith-context of a Jew, the matter at issue boils down to this: in what concrete way must I put into practice my faith in Yahweh to be able to claim the reward Yahweh promises to the loyal ones? Cf. Joel B. GREEN, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1989) 424-432; George MARTIN, *Bringing the Gospel of Luke to Life: Insight and Inspiration* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Inc., 2011) 297-305.

the “culture of death”. True there are a number of hope-infusing people, events and movements in evidence softening the terrible impact of the devastation created by the death-dealing forces. Present-day efforts to revitalize our faith (the principal objective of observing “The Year of Faith”, I understand) must challenge us to be proactive agents of hope in the first place.

2.1 *The Ascension of the Lord (Acts 1:6-11) - The Bedrock of Christian Hope*

The passage describing the Ascension is actually the first episode of the book of Acts. The verses preceding it (Acts 1:1-5) can be considered as a kind of prologue or preface similar to Lk 1:1-4. It indicates the limits of the work and helps the reader to move from the everyday world to the specific world of the narrative. The preface contains three elements: a) a reference to the author’s effort; b) a summary of the first book or volume; and c) a reference to a specific statement of Jesus, first in indirect speech and then through a direct quotation. By the time one reaches the end of the paragraph, one’s attention is fully on the person of Jesus, the central character of the narrative.

It is important to note that both the concluding verses of Luke (24:44-53) and the opening verses of Acts (1:1-11) have in common several details of crucial significance. Both contain a command to stay on in Jerusalem (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4); in both we find a reference to the coming of the Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4.8); to the role of the disciples as “witnesses” of Jesus (Lk 24:48; Acts 1:8) and to the universal scope of the mission they were undertaking (Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8).⁶ The Ascension scene itself is taken up in Acts to re-emphasize the commissioning of the Apostles, which according to the author, becomes the foundation of the Christian community’s mission.

One of the striking things about the Ascension is that although it is an article of faith according to the Nicene and the Apostles’ Creed (“He descended to the dead and ascended into heaven and is seated at the

6 Cf. Robert C. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, Volume Two: The Acts of the Apostles (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 11.

right hand of the Father”), the data is found only in certain of the New Testament books. In fact in a majority of writings there is no mention of it. Nothing in Matthew and Mark (i.e., if we consider that the original version of Mk ended with 16:8 and vv. 9-20 are a later addition). Most of the Pauline corpus is silent about the Ascension, so also the Catholic Epistles and the Book of Revelation. There are allusions found in Romans, Ephesians, John and Hebrews. Explicit treatment of the event we find only in Luke, Acts and the appendix to Mark.

2.1.1 The Problems raised by the Ascension Account

The first is a “spatial” problem. Behind the narration is the presupposition of a three-storeyed universe. That is precisely what is implied in the assertion “He descended to the dead and ascended into heaven”. Such a vision is surely based on an outdated understanding of the universe. Against the background of today’s incredible advances in the fields of astronomy and astrophysics, the abode of the dead cannot be below nor heaven above. Given the ever-expanding immensity of the universe, talking about “above” and “below” makes no sense.

There is, in addition, a “temporal” problem in the narration. The Acts account speaks of Ascension after 40 days of the Resurrection, while the Gospel of Luke suggests that it took place right on Easter Sunday. Various solutions are proposed to overcome the difficulty posed by the two accounts. Some say Luke-Acts was originally one continuous volume. When it was divided into two volumes, Lk 24:50-53 and Acts 1:1-5 were added. Others say that the double reference was deliberately added by the author to emphasize the fact that the Ascension marks the end of one era and the beginning of another. So it serves as the conclusion of one and the introduction of the other. Others point out that the number 40 in this context has a symbolic significance. Thus, we can think of Moses spending 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai (cf. Ex 24:18) before the giving of the old law. Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness before beginning his public ministry. Parallel to that, the ministry of the risen Christ also is preceded by 40 days of preparation. Moreover, according to the rabbinic tradition, 40 days was the period needed for disciples to learn and repeat the teachings of their master.

Another helpful approach to get around the problem of “time” could be to see it as part of the intention of the author while composing the two

accounts. In the Gospel his preoccupation was to establish the authenticity of the Resurrection. This he does by listing the various appearances of the risen Lord one after another. The aim was to affirm that these appearances took place rather than when they took place. With this in view all the various appearances are brought together as happenings of one single day, the day of Easter. The Ascension event also was appended to this sequence. In Acts, on the other hand, the preoccupation was to specify the time of Ascension in order to show that the Twelve had spent a considerable amount of time in the company of Jesus to be thus transformed into his authentic witnesses. In this connection it is instructive to note that Matthew says that the risen Lord appeared to his disciples in Galilee (Mt 28:16; cf. 28:7). It would be impossible for the disciples to reach Galilee from Jerusalem on the same day of Easter!

Then again, one must bear in mind that both Luke and Acts accounts are really inadequate ways of expressing a reality that is totally beyond human comprehension and articulation. Humans can only use the language of approximation to articulate it and vagueness is inherent to it. Indeed, the concepts of “before” and “after” belong to the realm of the material world, governed by the rules of time and space. But we as humans can only use our modes of expression to speak of other-worldly events and imprecision is part of it. Christ’s departure from this world was truly an other-worldly event. It did not involve before and after. In fact, the New Testament simply refers to Christ’s “exaltation” (cf. Acts 5:30-31; Phil 2:8-11) as the crowning moment of his earthly mission.

2.1.2 The Significance of the Ascension Narrative in Acts

Christ’s departure from the earth marks the end of an era, the era of the earthly Jesus. This is clearly indicated in vv. 9-11. There is a mention here of the cloud taking Jesus away. Cloud in biblical language is a symbol of God’s veiled presence (cf. Ex 24:15-18; Lk 9:34-35). The remark that a cloud took him away from their presence implies that he would no more be visibly present in their midst.

But the same departure also initiates a new era, the era of the risen Christ. That could be the significance of narrating the Ascension event as the first episode of the Acts narrative. What the passage highlights is not the event itself, but the disciples’ reaction to it. The angels on the

scene speak in almost rebuking terms: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” (v.11a). Their message is that the disciples were wrong in placing the focus on what had just happened. Instead, they were expected to apply their minds to the task enjoined on them. “The message of the two men to the Galileans is intended to turn their attention to the future and to what will result from the exaltation of Christ and his outpouring of the Spirit”.⁷ The reference to the Parousia in v. 11b may be to indicate the temporal limits of this responsibility. The events of the Ascension and the second coming effectively frame the mission of the Christian community. The precise time of the second coming is not of central significance. What is crucial is to concentrate on the task that lies ahead. What stands out in the context is that Jesus’ departure from the earth coincides with a profoundly significant development: the beginning of the Christian community’s mission of witnessing to him (cf. Acts 1:8).

2.1.3 *The Meaning of Ascension*

The New Testament treats the Resurrection and the Ascension with remarkable sobriety. For instance, it makes clear that no one really saw the event of the Resurrection. There are no exaggerated details in any of the Resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels. In contrast, the later apocryphal writings are full of hyperbolic portrayals. Once again, for the New Testament authors, the Resurrection of Jesus is not resuscitation; i.e., a return to the former terrestrial existence, as in the case of Lazarus in Jn 11:43-44 or Jairus’ daughter in Mk 5:21-43. Jesus is not described as living on earth as previously for the 40 intervening days between the Resurrection and the Ascension. One interesting question in this context would be: Where did Jesus come from during the appearances? In Lk 24:26 (the Emmaus episode) Jesus asks the two disciples: Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer all this and so enter into his glory?” This would imply that Jesus had already entered into his glory.

Luke uses apocalyptic imageries (stage props) such as cloud, angelic interpreters, and going up to heaven for explaining the basic idea that

7 Joseph A. FITZMYER, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, etc.: Doubleday, 1998) 209.

Jesus was exalted. The exaltation of Jesus is the focal point of the New Testament affirmation elsewhere too. Seen against this background, we might conclude that Ascension is nothing more than an appearance from glory in which Christ took his final leave from the community of his disciples. In a certain sense we can say that Luke has “historicized” the event of Ascension by giving a concrete spatial-temporal expression to it. Someone has said - somewhat inelegantly - that Luke has “eff-ed” the ineffable! This is only done by Luke among the New Testament authors. The reason was his concern for the historical perspective. The passion, death, Resurrection, exaltation and the outpouring of the Spirit together make up the Paschal Mystery. Luke has broken up the different aspects of the one event in an attempt to make it more comprehensible, thus concretizing an essentially abstract, spiritual experience.

Ascension pre-figures the ultimate destiny of all human beings and in effect works as the guarantee of the glorious future that awaits us. Paul expresses that hope graphically in 1 Thess 4:16-17. Like Luke, Paul also uses apocalyptic symbols to speak of the fact that the final destiny of all Christians is “to be with the Lord always”. That is indeed the finest expression of Christian hope and thus the Ascension of the Lord becomes the symbol par excellence of our hope.

3 Audacity-endowing Faith

Acts places before us the picture of numerous individuals whose faith raised them to extraordinary levels of audacity in the practice of it. Attentive reading of those stories convinces us that an authentic attempt to live one’s faith empowers one for courageous witnessing. That in turn will help us form convictions that inform and shape our own faith today.

3.1 Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1-22) - Stunning Audacity

3.1.1 The Background of the Episode

The event described in the passage is a spin-off of the crippled beggar’s miraculous cure at the temple gate portrayed in Acts 3:1-10. It occasioned an immediate speech by Peter right at the temple precincts

(at Solomon's Portico), which had a provocative dimension attached to it (3:12-26). Addressing the public in the temple premises to speak in glowing terms about a man condemned and put to death by the religious authorities was tantamount to challenging their authority. The temple represented their seat of power. So, Peter was seen as challenging them in their own backyard. There were two other elements that were provocative in the gesture. Peter asserted that the crucified man was actually the Messiah and God's raising of him from death was a vindication of that fact (vv.14-15). Resurrection of the dead was an issue stoutly opposed by an influential section of the temple leadership: the Sadducees. Additionally Peter made it irrefutably clear that the cure of the crippled man was wrought by the name (read through the power)⁸ of Jesus.

Furthermore, the cure miracle had ramifications that went far beyond the restoration of the physical well-being of a congenitally crippled man.⁹ That the very first miracle the Apostles worked was taking place at the temple gate was obviously disconcerting for the old guard. They would hear the alarm bells ringing soon after they thought they had safely put away the Messianic pretender. Here in this case the beneficiary of the miracle was someone the Jewish law considered as unfit to participate in the temple liturgy (cf. Deut 15:21; Mal 1:8, 13; further Lev 21:16-18). So the man's destiny was changed in more than one way by the cure he underwent. He was raised to a new kind of dignity before the law. This could have been perceived as another irritant by the so-called custodians of the law. The cure of the lame man had, therefore, physical, spiritual and social dimensions attached to it.

Three groups are mentioned as representing the religious authorities of the Jerusalem temple: the priests, (the head of) the temple police and

8 Cf. Richard J. Dillon, "Acts of the Apostles," in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), 734, maintains that "name" and "power" are parallel concepts. By invoking the name of Jesus Peter received empowerment from the Lord to heal the lame man.

9 For a detailed discussion of the many dimensions of the cure of the crippled beggar, cf. Thomas Malipurathu, "Mission as Mediating God's Healing Touch: The Polyvalent Symbolism of a Cure Miracle," in *Verbum SVD*, 52(2011) 217-234 (especially pp. 224-233).

the Sadducees. They were the ones who confronted Peter and John while they were still speaking to the crowd around them (4:1). They are also depicted as the first opponents of the emerging community of Jesus' disciples. Their annoyance was further intensified by the fact that the Apostles were "uneducated and ordinary men" (cf. 4:13) while they themselves were well groomed and finely cultivated with the exclusive right to engage the crowds around the temple premises. So, many were the grounds on which the two Apostles were arrested, detained and subsequently subjected to a "trial" by the Sanhedrin. The healing of the lame man, the reaction of the public to the spectacular cure, Peter's immediate attempt to make the public understand how the miracle was to be interpreted and the alarm felt by the religious authorities are all factors working together to set the stage for Peter's disclosure of the healing's full meaning.¹⁰

3.1.2 *Peter's Bold Witnessing and Its Implications*

Peter and John had not yet finished what they had to say to the gathered people when they were confronted by the temple authorities. Although the speaker is Peter, and Peter alone (cf. 3:12), the address is attributed to both the Apostles (cf. 4:1). This joint-action motif is presumably the author's way of emphasizing the community-witness aspect of the early Church. Another point that the narrator makes in this context is that there was a sizable crowd who listened to Peter's address, numbering about five thousand.¹¹ Apparently the looming conflict with the authorities served only to attract more people to the ranks of the fledgling community. Peter's speech is described with the technical word *ho logos*, standing for "the Christian message". In this sense it is also used in Acts 6:4 and 8:4.

The author presents the people (*laos*) as being on the side of the Apostles and the latter's opponents as comprising three groups: the priests, the temple security force (made up of the Levites on duty in the temple) and the Sadducees. Some important manuscripts have "chief

¹⁰ Cf. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity II*, 61.

¹¹ Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992) 76: "The point here is not the actual number, but the evidence of substantial growth among the populace".

priests" in place of "priests". It is to be noted that in the passion narrative in Luke, we find that the "chief priests" along with "officers of the temple police" and the elders are the ones who accost Jesus on the Mount of Olives (cf. Lk 22:47-53). Here in the Acts passage, however, only the captain of the force (*ho stratēgos tou hierou*) is mentioned. The reference is to the head of the temple police, who may have been the second most important authority in the temple, after the high priest.¹² The Sadducees (*Saddoukaioi*) constituted a group within Judaism, like the Pharisees and the Essenes. Sadducees traced their lineage to Zadok, the Aaronid priest under Solomon, or even back to Zadok, the elder son of Aaron (cf. 1 Chr 5:30-35). Sadducees comprised both priests and lay men of aristocratic background, which explained their influence in matters concerning the temple. They were noted for the strict interpretation of the written Torah, radically distancing from any of the oral traditions such as the *hālākāh* (= "regulations handed down by former generations") of the Pharisees. Since the written Torah made no mention of the resurrection of the dead, they refused to accept it as part of their belief and this brought them into ideological conflict with the Pharisees (cf. Acts 23:6-12). In the Gospel Luke depicts them as "those who say there is no resurrection" (Lk 20:27). The witness the Apostles provided to the Resurrection of Jesus—and that too within the temple premises—may have sounded particularly outrageous to them.

After the night spent in detention, Peter and John were made to stand before the highest body of religious authorities, the Sanhedrin. The body was made up of three categories of men: leaders (*archontes*), elders (*presbyteroi*) and scribes (*grammateis*). It numbered seventy-one (seventy members and their president). *Synedrion* stood for "conference", "session" or "meeting", literally meaning "group of those sitting together". It was the official designation for the Jerusalem religious council (cf. Lk 22:66; Acts 5:27, 34, 41, etc.). When the two accused took the stand, the group had only one question to Peter and John: "By what power or by what name did you do this?" The question took into consideration only the cure of the lame beggar and the issue of the resurrection was forgotten.

12 Cf. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 297, who further notes that in the rabbinic tradition, this officer was called the "prefect of the priests".

Peter's opening submission (vv. 8-12) was coherent and incisive. There was no room for ambiguity or vagueness in it. More than that, it was demonstrative of incredible boldness from the part of Peter. This was made possible, the narrator reminds us, by being filled with the Holy Spirit.¹³ What is articulated in it was for the knowledge of all concerned: "rulers of the people and elders" and "all people of Israel". Now that developments have reached this far, Peter concluded, there was no point in mincing words or being apologetic about his and the community's convictions. The Rubicon was crossed, he surmised!

Peter emphatically made three points in his intervention: a) the cure of the lame man was carried out in the name of Jesus and through his power; b) the august body he was addressing and its members were indubitably culpable for the appalling treatment meted out to Jesus; their actions were deliberate and pre-meditated; and c) this same Jesus whom they knowingly rejected was indeed the one who mediated God's salvation to all.

3.1.3 *Peter, the Epitome of Audacity*

Peter's transformation is breath-taking. The Gospels present him as someone with initiative, yet impulsive and timid. The darkest moment in his life was that of disowning Jesus, an incident all four evangelists have recorded (Mt 26:57-68; Mk 14:66-72; Lk 22:56-62; Jn 18:16-18, 25-27). It was the numbing fear of consequences that prompted him to take that unfortunate decision of denying Jesus. Of course his repentance was almost immediate, yet the weight of that harrowing tragedy never fully left him. Fear of the Jews dominated the lives of all disciples - Peter included - in the days immediately following the crucifixion, so much so they preferred to remain behind locked doors (cf. Jn 20:19). It is when seen against such a backdrop that the new picture of Peter presented to us in the early chapters of Acts appears as stunning. His address to the Sanhedrin was not his first attempt at public speaking. At least on three previous occasions the author of Acts depicts him as speaking to the public (cf. 1:16-22; 2:14-40; 3:12-26).

13 Johnson, *Acts*, 77, observes that the phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" is part of Luke's stereotypical characterization of his main characters as prophets, both in the Gospel (1:15, 41, 67; 4:1) and in Acts (2:4; 4:31; 6:3, 5: 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9).

If the disowning of Jesus marked the darkest moment of Peter's life as a disciple, this stirring avowal of his lord and master before the Sanhedrin can be construed as marking the high point of his journey on the path of discipleship. As a matter of fact, the narrator seems to insistently make the point that Peter had achieved a singular triumph over a powerful enemy. The learned assembly was taken aback as much by the boldness of the two Apostles as by the fact that the two were "uneducated and ordinary men".¹⁴ The members of the Sanhedrin found themselves tongue-tied, not only because Peter argued so convincingly, but also because the proof of his contention was present on the scene as a flesh and blood human being. In their closed-door session they had to admit as much to themselves (cf. vv. 15-17). The developments happening then truly provided occasion for the literal fulfillment of Jesus' prophesy that Luke records in his Gospel: "...for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict" (21:15).

The word *parrēsia*, used to refer to the disposition of Peter and John in Acts 4:13, deserves special attention. The word lends itself to being interpreted as "frankness", "outspokenness" or "courage" in common parlance, but here the author seems to attach to it the meaning of "Spirit-inspired eloquence".¹⁵ What the episode as a whole highlights is the dramatic way in which the apostolic courage or boldness was manifested. *Parrēsia* becomes a characteristic of Christian testimony because of instances such as the present one. Another relevant interpretation of it is as "audacity". Peter was no more the timid person who would run away with trembling knees at the first mention of the word "danger"; he had been transformed into a man of steely determination prepared to take the fight right into the enemy camp. He, with John by his side, decided to throw caution to the winds and in this way emerged as an epitome of audacity.

14. "The boldness of Peter in bearing witness even to them, the highest religious authorities in Jerusalem, astounds them", Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 295.

15. *Ibid.*, 302. TANNEHILL, *Narrative Unity II*, 61, adds a further specification to the word: "especially boldness of speech in circumstances that might inhibit frank speech".

It was this audacity from the side of the Apostles that stopped the mighty Sanhedrin in its tracks. They were simply disarmed and rendered visibly indecisive. Even the closed-door session could not come up with an effective strategy to deal with the Apostles. Calling the two back, they “ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (v.18). But no sooner had these words been out of their mouths, than the irrepressible duo came up with another, even more tricky, protestation: “Whether it is right in God’s sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard”. The members of the Jerusalem religious council were utterly dumbfounded before the astonishing boldness of Peter and John. They were ridiculously exposed for their impotence, for they only could make additional threats and release the Apostles.

The episode that follows depicts the believing community’s response to the latest development (4:23-31). “This scene also places the developing conflict in the context of the sacred paradigms provided by Scripture and the passion story of Jesus”.¹⁶ The Church’s first reaction was expressed in terms of a prayer addressed to God, the sovereign Lord. The object of the prayer was the request for a renewed gift of *parrēsia* so that the believers could speak the word with unflagging enthusiasm. Their prayer was immediately answered and that too with a visible sign. The place where they were huddled together shook while all the supplicants received a refill of the Holy Spirit. This in turn fired up their enthusiasm and they proclaimed the word with even more pronounced audacity.

4 The Stephen Sequence (Acts 6:1-8:3) - Audacity-instilling Hope in Action

4.1 The Significance of Stephen’s Story

The Stephen episode, recorded in great detail by the author of Acts, has a landmark function in the development of the book’s plot. Apart from Peter and Paul (and Barnabas as Paul’s companion), only Stephen’s ministry is portrayed with so many details. It covers Stephen’s choice as one of the leaders comprising the second rung of Church-leadership

16. TANNEHILL, *Narrative Unity II*, 73.

(in fact he heads the list of the new group of leaders), his spirited ministry, a stirring speech that he delivered before the religious council of Jerusalem and his brutal stoning. "Stephen, although his role is comparatively brief, shares the qualifications of leading figures of Scripture and of leading figures in Luke-Acts, suggesting that his words and actions have great importance for the story".¹⁷ For the narrator, the event serves as a true turning point in the story. With Stephen's stoning the conflict between the Christian community and the Jewish leadership reaches a point of no return. In fact at that point the Christian movement crosses an important boundary. The witnessing mission, so far confined to the Jewish segment of the population, now becomes extended to the people outside the Jewish fold.¹⁸

4.2 *Stephen's Courageous Ministry of Witnessing*

Stephen's rise to leadership in the Church happened against the background of an inner-group crisis in the community. One particular section of the believers (those belonging to the group designated as *hellenistoi* [= Hellenists]) felt themselves discriminated against and the blame for this was put on the other group named *hebraioi* (= Hebrews), apparently the more dominant group then. The Apostles who came to know of the rising tension, met together and decided to appoint a second rung of leaders, who they stipulated would take up certain administrative chores in the community. This arrangement - the community leaders argued - would leave them with more time to attend to the more essential duties of their call, i.e., prayer and the service of the word. The decision found favour with the believers as a whole and a group of seven men was nominated. Stephen was the first to be chosen because he was already noted as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:6). The narrator gives us the impression that the menace of conflict and division was thwarted through the judicious and timely intervention of the Apostles, so that the witnessing mission of the Church could go on uninterruptedly. Remarkably, the story of the inner-Church conflict and its resolution is framed by references to the growth of the community (cf. 6:1, 7).

17. Ibid., 83.

18. Cf. Thomas Malipurathu, "Mission as Witnessing: A Biblical Reflection," in *Vidyajyoti* 70 (2006) 807-826 (811-812).

Stephen's ministry of witnessing is mentioned prominently by the author as it was accompanied by spectacular wonders and signs among the people. But predictably such activity brought him into immediate conflict with the opponents of the community. He got into regular squabbles with them but finding that they could not outwit him with arguments, his adversaries started accusing him of blasphemy. Subsequently he was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin for trial. The adversaries in this case were not the Jewish religious leadership as was the case with the Apostles Peter and John, but the Diaspora Jews, who like Stephen himself, were not permanent residents of Jerusalem or even Palestine. The gist of their accusation against Stephen was that he was constantly speaking against the temple and the law (cf. 6:13-14). These were matters of crucial significance for the Diaspora Jews because it was their special regard for the temple and the Torah that functioned as the bulwark of their very presence in the city of Jerusalem.

When brought before the Sanhedrin for trial and Stephen's enemies, making use of false witnesses, testified against him raising the above charges, the high priest asked him for an explanation. Stephen was neither flustered by the presence of the highest religious authorities of Jerusalem nor intimidated by the gravity of the charges brought against him. With remarkable serenity he responds to the accusations (cf. 7:2-53). What is especially striking is that his speech was not designed to secure acquittal on the charges; instead he turned the charges into an indictment of his audience.¹⁹ It was not his intention to win the favour of the audience and thus escape punishment. He was only moved by one objective and that was to bear courageous testimony to the saving mission of the Righteous One. In his response to the authorities Stephen focuses on two points: the role of Moses in the history of the people of Israel and the significance of the temple as the dwelling place of God.

The story of Moses is the most developed section of the speech. Stephen emphasized the importance of Moses in God's saving purpose, thus showing the high regard he had for him, yet by referring to events in the story of Israel he established the real nature of the opposition that

19 Cf. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity II*, 85.

servant of God faced. Similarly on the question of the temple's centrality he had sound insights, too. God cannot be restricted to any structure, he insisted, humanly constructed temples cannot determine God's location or dwelling place. The declaration of God's independence of the temple in Jerusalem was also a declaration of God's availability with or without the temple (cf. 7:48-50). Temple had a privileged position as a place of fulfillment of God's promise to God's people, yet it was not a *sine qua non* for the worship of God because God's presence is everywhere in heaven and on earth. The unqualified insistence on the primacy of the temple was also an act of defiance against God, a defiance which was manifested in the continuous rejection of the prophets. Its most devastating expression was the betrayal and murder of Jesus, the Righteous One, concluded Stephen.

If Stephen's words up to the point of resolutely holding his adversaries responsible for the thoughtless rejection and iniquitous murder of Jesus (cf. 7:52) can be made out as an expression of his astounding audacity in the face of sure and severe consequences, the rest of his interaction with them (cf. 7: 54-60) gives evidence of his fervent hope in the promises of his divine saviour. At the moment when his enraged enemies pounced on him with visible expressions of their flaming fury, the martyr spoke of the vision he was blessed with. He saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand, bathed in the radiance of the same glory: "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" His listeners interpreted his words as blatant blasphemy, but for Stephen himself it was an expression of his ardent hope based on the indubitable promise of the same Lord: "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God" (Lk 12:8). Through his final words of leave-taking: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit", the proto-martyr articulated the quintessence of Christian hope.

Conclusion

Observances such as "The Year of Faith", I suggest, must challenge us to subject our own personal faith-commitment to closer scrutiny. This can be best achieved when we place its real picture alongside the models of faith-commitment drawn up by the New Testament witnesses. The book of Acts is particularly relevant in this context. Attentive reading of

the book will make us see that the author is creating a continuous narrative by stringing together a number of events in which different disciples and communities of disciples lived out the invaluable treasure of their Christian faith under varying circumstances and responding to manifold challenges. "Luke is selective," P.M. MEAGHER informs us, "exemplary scenes are chosen and these are meant to create an understanding of the complex reality of the Community of Faith, its life and evangelizing tasks."²⁰

Christian faith is admittedly up against hard times today. Various developments within church-communities and outside and the way they are packaged and marketed by the insatiable, 24-hour media - always on the lookout for the next controversy - impact our lives and our thinking in manifold ways. What is more, they make many ask themselves in desperation if faith-commitment is a viable option today. While most organized religions find themselves at the receiving end, Christian faith perhaps has had to take the cruelest blow. Afflictions discombobulating it range from general weariness towards ritual practices to clamorous mass-exits of adherents. Nevertheless, many who have plumbed its depths and drawn immense benefits from that effort will continue to vouch for it as a relevant and meaningful option.

Faith, they say, is never stationary: either it grows or it withers; sometimes it dies. Robustness of faith requires devout attention and constant nurturing. And for our journey of faith even in these challenging times the option is only one as it was with the early Christians - nonchalantly forward with hope and audacity!

20 "Pentecost Spirit: To Witness," in *Vidyajyoti* 62 (1998) 276.

Mary's Faith Journey

Santhosh Maria

Here the author highlights the faith journey of Mary from the gospel events and analyses the progression of Mary's faith journey. With the mystery of the Annunciation Mary begins her faith journey; in the Visitation she proclaims it and in the losing and finding of Jesus she wakes up to her new dimensions of faith. She learns to interiorize the mystery of faith in the silence of her heart and gives witness to her faith at the first miracle of Jesus. Jesus proposes her as a model disciple who does the will of the Father in her life at all times. Standing beneath the cross she perfects her faith and thus becomes a companion and mother in our faith journey.

Introduction

When the days are dark and dim, all look for a light to behold, a hand to support and a voice to encourage. At times one may receive all three, yet other times none. Yea, the paradox of the life at time demands from us, to face its sharp realities even without any of the three. If one can still say "yes", there lay the victory. Mary's faith journey is such a victorious story, may be heard a thousand times, yet it is still fresh to interest any one. For as humans as we are, we have daily huddles of discouragements, sorrows, sickness, misunderstanding and so on. Mary the mother of God and of us shows through her life, the marvelous way she believed God and kept her going till the end of her mission with which she was entrusted. She was a simple woman like any woman but handled by God not so humanly, so as to raise her from a human mother to the dignity of the mother of God. Mary endured all the trials with deep faith in God, even though at times she experienced being deceived by him. St Augustine says "Mary believed and conceived." Mary's

conception of her son was an act of loving faith in God. She made an act of faith and word became flesh in her.

Through this article, I would like to high light Mary's life as a faith journey walked from the Chamber of Annunciation at Nazareth to the Upper Room at Jerusalem. When the journey began Mary thought it was God's son following her, 'the woman of faith' but soon the path turned the other way, when she heard him asking, "How is that you sought me?" There after only silence and surrender until she returns God's son back to the Father. That was the victory of this woman of faith.

1. The Mystery of Annunciation: the beginning of Mary's Faith Journey

The word of the living God, announced to Mary by the angel, referred to her: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (Lk. 1:31). By accepting this announcement, Mary was to become the "Mother of the Lord," and the divine mystery of the Incarnation was to be accomplished in her. "The Father of mercies willed that the consent of the predestined Mother should precede the Incarnation."¹ And Mary gives this consent, after she has heard everything the messenger has to say. She says: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). This fiat of Mary-"let it be to me"-was decisive, on the human level, for the accomplishment of the divine mystery. There is a complete harmony with the words of the Son, who, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, says to the Father as he comes into the world: "Sacrifices and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.... Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:5-7).² Mary uttered her fiat in faith and began her journey. In faith she entrusted herself to God without reserve and "devoted herself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son." And as the Fathers of the Church teach-she conceived this Son in her mind before she conceived him in her womb: precisely in faith! (*St Augustine, De Sancta Virginitate III, 398*) Elizabeth praised Mary:

1 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, 56.

2 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 1987, 64.

"And blessed is she who *believed* that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." For she grasped in faith that Mary of Nazareth presented herself at the door of their house as the Mother of the Son of God. So joyfully she proclaimed, "The mother of my Lord comes to me"!

However, Elizabeth's words "And blessed is she who believed" do not apply only to that particular moment of the Annunciation. Certainly the Annunciation is the culminating moment of Mary's faith in her awaiting of Christ, but it is also the point of departure from which her whole "journey towards God" begins, her whole pilgrimage of faith. And on this road, in an eminent and truly heroic manner- indeed with an ever greater heroism of faith-the "obedience" which she professes to the word of divine revelation will be fulfilled. Mary, who by the eternal will of the Most High stands, at the very center of those "inscrutable ways" and "unsearchable judgments" of God, conforms herself to them in the dim light of faith, accepting fully and with a ready heart everything that is decreed in the divine plan.³

Mary's faith can also be compared to that of Abraham. In the salvific economy of God's revelation, Abraham's faith constitutes the beginning of the Old Covenant; Mary's faith at the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant. Just as Abraham "in hope believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations," so Mary, at the Annunciation, having professed her virginity ("How shall this be, since I have no husband?") believed that through the power of the Most High, by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would become the Mother of God's Son in accordance with the angel's revelation: "The child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35).⁴

Mary's faith response in Lk1:38 correspond to the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Lk22:42). In Lk 1:38 the verb used is ἀσπείρομαι, the middle aorist optative and in Lk 22:42, the middle present imperative.⁵ Thus Mary's faith response rises to a level in quality as that of Jesus himself.

3 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 1987,13

4 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 14

5 Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 133.

2. Magnificat: the Proclamation of Mary's Faith

When Elizabeth greeted her young kinswoman coming from Nazareth, Mary replied with the Magnificat. In her greeting, Elizabeth first called Mary "blessed" because of "the fruit of her womb," and then she called "blessed" because of her faith (Lk 1:42, 45). These two blessings referred directly to the annunciation. That which hidden in the depth of the "obedience of faith" at the Annunciation is now springing forth into a faith proclamation, into a beautiful song of praise.⁶

Luke in Mary's Magnificat anticipates what will later spell out in Jesus' Beatitudes. The connection between the Magnificat and the Beatitudes are closer. The poor just like Mary know and understand the blessedness of poverty in a different way; blessed are the meek, who just like Mary, experience another sort of power; and blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, just as Mary did. This song coming from the young Mary's voice, from the wombs and meetings of those women, remains in the air, forever shouting out God's actions among men and women and proclaiming down the centuries that the powerful will be overthrown, that the rich will be emptied, and the humble will be rewarded in the reign of God.⁷ This is it exactly what Mary believed and proclaimed.

3. Losing and Finding Jesus: learning of the New Dimensions of Faith

The Gospel according Luke chapter 2: 41-52, gives us the account of losing and finding of Jesus in the temple. Joseph and Mary miss Jesus and frantically look for him, walking back to the temple, after a day's journey towards Nazareth. They reach back to the temple only after three days and found their boy among the teachers of the law. They were indeed surprised at his wisdom yet, anxious at his sudden disappearance. Mary questions him. Jesus utters his first words recorded in the Gospel: "How is that you sought me? Did you not know that I

6 John Paul II, *Mary God's Yes to Man: An Introduction to Redemptoris Mater*, by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 117-118.

7 Carmina Navia Velasco. "Mary of Nazareth Revisited" *Concilium* 4(2008): 19-26.

must be in my Father's house?" (LK 2:48-49) Since Luke has surrounded the scene with reference to Jesus' wisdom (2:40,52), it is not surprising that these first words show Jesus' self understanding of his relationship to God as Father. But his parents did not understand his words.⁸ Like some mothers Mary underwent through the pain of possible physical loss of her only son and like all mothers the still greater emotional loss of her baby son, now grown up, more knowledgeable and more independent and the consequent shock of the generation gap.⁹ Jesus was beginning to recognize his true identity, which may for a while Mary had been forgotten with her grief of missing Jesus. Now she tries to understand the new dimensions of her faith response to God. As a human being Mary has to learn the new ways of faith not instantly but gradually as she progressed on her faith journey. Mary has to discover the meaning of Simeon's prophesy, heard twelve years ago: "A Sword will pass through your own soul." She is learning that Jesus puts his relation to his Father over the family ties.

4. Pondering God's doings in her heart: the Interiorization of Mary's Faith

Mary treasured the word of God and kept it in her heart. Luke tells us three instances where Mary silently pondered on what had happened and even though she could not grasp their true meaning, yet believed them as God's mysterious doings. When the shepherds came to Mary and narrated their magnificent experience, Mary seemed to be wondering about all that from the midst of the utter poverty they were experiencing at the moment. Again when they went to the temple to offer their first born son, the prophesy of Simeon astonished her. "This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed... and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk2:35). She might not have understood these words until she stood beneath the cross. Luke narrates a third time Mary doing the same when Jesus was lost and found in the temple. Even though she could not at once digest the

8 Raymond E. Brown et al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1979), 158.

9 Valerian Pereira, "Mary- A Model for Christian Spirituality Today" *Dhyana* 8 (2008): 9-28.

stern words from Jesus, their twelve year old boy, when she questioned him. Yet Mary kept pondering these words in her heart. Mary's treasuring the words means her whole hearted acceptance of the word with a contemplative fervor. As any normal human being, particularly as a simple woman Mary did not understand the depth of all these events which troubled her. But she believed in the one who acted behind all these events. Pondering over the word with single-minded concentration leads to the interiorization of the word. It is followed by personal transformation through illumination.¹⁰ The Greek expressions employed by the Evangelist literally means "keeping together" and "throwing together", usually translated as "kept and pondered over." This is the expression of faith because normally all have the tendency to move away from difficult things. Because of Mary's faith in her Abba, she would accept anything from him and keep them close to her heart and ponder over them, until they would become her own.¹¹

5. Wedding at Cana: Mary's giving Witness to her Faith

Wedding at Cana brings out a new dimension of Mary's faith. Mary indeed believed that her son was God's own and so he alone can save that poor family from their embarrassment. According to Jewish custom, a marriage feast lasted seven days. As the guest were arriving each day, wine must have flowed liberally and the shrinking supply must have been hopelessly short, so as to cause anxiety to all. At this moment when the hospitality of the host was likely to be put to shame, the appeal of Mary proves decisive. She notices the desperateness of the situation, the whisperings, the pain and the embarrassment. She simply calls the attention of Jesus to this situation.¹² She approaches her son with the freedom of a mother. But his answer to her request, "Woman, what has this concern of yours to do with me? My hour has not yet come," which echoes the attitude of the synoptic where family ties are not important. There is some reproof here in the words of Jesus as if his mother is

10 Martin Kuzhivelil, "Mary, the Woman Transformed by Word," *In Christo* 44 (2006): 51-55.

11 Augustine Mullor, "Mary in the New Testament," *Dhyana* 8 (2008): 29-35.

12 R.J Raja, "Mary and the Marginalized," *Vidya Jyoti* 51 (1987): 213-229.

making this request because she is his mother.¹³ At this juncture Mary witnesses her faith like the heroine of the story, asking the servants to do what Jesus commands. And the result was the first miracle of Jesus, the solemn inauguration of his public ministry to which Mary was the first witness. And she became a model of faith for his disciples, they believed in Jesus. She already practiced what Jesus would later teach his disciples "whatever you ask in my name I will do (Jn14:13). At Cana Mary is there not only as a mother but also as a believer who witnesses her faith.

6. To Hear the Word and Do it: Mary becoming a Model of Faith

Mary's faith as a disciple "hearing the word of God and keeping it" was the cause of her motherhood. Her conceiving of Christ was from her point of view first and foremost a faith event. The word of God she heard and cherished were not a just message from God but the person of God himself.

Let us have a glance through the synoptic, where Jesus proclaims, and "My mother and brothers are those who hear the word and keep it." Mark (3:31-35) and Matthew (12:46-50) report that the mother and brothers stood outside, without explaining why they did not come into the presence of Jesus; indeed, the contrast between the physical family outside and the family of disciples inside is a point of discussion that needed to be carried out till the end of their gospels. In Luke (8:19-21) we have a positive picture of the family of Jesus, where he explains that, "They were unable to come to him, because of the crowd." Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke asks no question as such which would challenge the identity of the members of his family: "Who are my mother and my brothers"? But Lucan Jesus praises them saying, "my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." The last two verbs are in present participle which suggest that they "continue to hear and keep on doing" the will of God. And this saying gain more credibility in the context of the parable of the sower, where the seeds that fell on the good soil produced a hundred fold. The good soil, are those who hear the word and hold it fast in the heart and bring forth

13 Patrick J. Bearsley, "Mary the Perfect Disciple: A Paradigm for Mariology," *TS* 41 (1980):461-504.

fruits with patience. Mary's first response in Lk1:38, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word," finds an active realization here.¹⁴ And here Mary's relationship to Jesus rises to a supernatural level from physical level.

7. Witnessing Her Son's Sacrifice on the Cross: Mary Perfecting her Faith

The Gospel of John gives us a detailed description of Mary's presence beneath the cross of Jesus. Here the 'hour' of Jesus comes to a solemn conclusion, and Mary is there to witness it as she began in Cana. The disciple whom Jesus loved has a special significance in John's Gospel, for he is the one who believed when all others doubted his resurrection (Jn 20:9). He is the ideal man disciple and Mary the ideal woman disciple, both is entrusted to each other. Mary obeyed the will of the Father to the very end. The faith demanded and obliged at the chamber of Annunciation had to be prolonged until the hill of Calvary, and there she was asked to offer her burnt offering, witnessing each hard breath of her dying son, moment by moment. It was more perfect sacrifice than the Father of faith; there he was given a lamb instead of his only son, but on Calvary, no lamb but the LAMB. Mary who questioned the angel at annunciation, "How can this be?.." is now silent, as she looked at the Word she conceived, "the living and active word, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." That was the perfection of her faith too, (it is finished) and with him she too bowed her head.

Peter Chrysologus (380-450 CE), bishop of Ravenna and defender of the Ephesus Council's *Theotokos* formulation, portrayed the Virgin Mary as the second Eve, come now in the fullness of time to meet the resurrected Christ and undo the disobedience of the first Eve: "She who had taken perfidy away from paradise hurries to take faith from the tomb; she, who had snatched death from the hands of life, hastens to snatch life from the hands of death."¹⁵

14 Raymond E. Brown et al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament*, 170.

15 Carol Stream, "Mary in the Imagination of the Church," 35.

8. At the Upper Room:

Mary accompanying Us in Our Faith Journey

Mary is the dawn of the church at Pentecost, the last of the scenes in which she figures in scripture. The Acts of the Apostles gives us the description of Mary's presence along with twelve in the upper room waiting for the Holy Spirit. Mary's faith held together the new born church and she was the focal point there, because she now represented Jesus. Her prayers is said to have taken place in the unity and fellowship of all those who had similarly experienced the loss of Jesus, and who at the same time were taken hold of by the spirit.¹⁶ It is precisely Mary's faith which marks the beginning of the new and eternal covenant of God with us in Jesus Christ; this heroic faith of hers precedes the apostolic witness of the church and ever remains in the church's heart, hidden like a special heritage of God's revelation. All those who from generation to generation accept the apostolic witness of the church share in that mysterious inheritance and in a sense share in Mary's faith.¹⁷ The entire body of the faithful pours forth instant supplications to the Mother of God and Mother of human kind that she, who aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers, may now, exalted as she is above all the angels and saints, intercede before her Son in the fellowship of all the saints, until all families of people, whether they are honored with the title of Christian or whether they still do not know the Savior, may be happily gathered together in peace and harmony into one people of God, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity.¹⁸ When asked "what Mary meant" personally, Cardinal Ratzinger replied, "an expression of the closeness to God, it is with her involvement that the incarnation becomes really concrete and comprehensible. It is very moving that the Son of God has a human mother and that we are all entrusted to her care."¹⁹

16 R.J. Raja, "Mary and the Marginalized," 229.6

17 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 1987, 27.

18 *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, 64

19 Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 296.

Conclusion

In this year of faith, journeying with Mary through the pages of the gospels, reflecting on her faith strengthens our faith life too. She is there not only as a model to imitate but also as a mother who can hold our hands and lead us to God. Mary's power of intercession was proved right from Cana through the centuries. The thought of having such a wonderful mother in our Christian living is always consoling and she never betrays our trust in her. Active Marian devotion has been always the heritage of Catholic Church and it was a devotion that led to Christ, the true light. In the words of Cardinal Ratzinger, "A correct Marian devotion requires that faith be accompanied not only by reason but also by "reasons of the heart." The head must reflect with lucidity, but the heart must be able to feel the warmth; faith assures the full human dimension."

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth
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Professing a Creedal Faith

Errol D'Lima

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Persons who share a common faith are said to belong to a religious community. An individual person may practise a type of spirituality of his/her own but in claiming to belong to a religion, he/she is united to others in a community that shares a common belief in God. What is held in common embodies the essential insights that give meaningfulness to a particular religion. This meaningfulness includes a content that can be articulated in and by the community as a whole. These articulations are seen in a community's rituals, its scriptures, its modes of worship, its worldview and its ethical codes, and these assure it of its specific identity, values and transformative power as seen by the public. *Mantras*, *namakirtana* and the Jesus Prayer are examples of such rituals. In addition to such articulations, many religious communities put together statements that spell out the faith they profess. Some of these faith statements are referred to as 'creeds'.

Faith Statements

Statements of faith are seen to perform a variety of functions for the members belonging to a religion. These are associated with religious beliefs and are expressed in pithy formulas. The twice-born Hindu repeats the *Gayatri mantra* daily.¹

The *Shema* found in Deuteronomy 6/4 reflects the classical Jewish declaration of faith in Yahweh.² Some religions use forms of worship which underline the main tenets of their faith, e.g. where no material representation of God through material reality is permitted.

Confessional formulas are also statements of faith which spell out the specific faith understanding of groups that wish to distance themselves from the prevailing faith understanding found in a given religion. Such formulas were prominent at the time of the Reformation in the 16th century and later. The Augsburg Confession (1530), prepared by Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), embodied the essential Lutheran position as regards saving faith. It was approved by Martin Luther (1483-1546) and

1. Raimundo Panikkar with the collaboration of N. Shanta, M. A. R. Rogers, B. Baumer, M. Bidolli (edited and translated with introductions and notes): *The Vedic Experience, Mantramanjari, An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1977:

*"We meditate upon the glorious splendour
Of the Vivifier divine.*

May he himself illumine our minds." (p 38).

"The Gayatri accompanies man not only on his daily round, but also in the most solemn moments of his life. It forms an important part of the initiation ceremony. Henceforward the young man, having received the mantra from his master, will have the right of uttering it and thus of participating in the spiritual world that links him with others who praise and worship God through the living words of this cosmic prayer." (pp 42-3)

2. Paul J Achtemeier (General Editor): *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, San Francisco, 1985, p 939: " 'Hear you Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one.' The last letters of the first and last words of this verse are written in Hebrew Bibles in oversized script, thereby forming the Hebrew word 'witness' to indicate that by this verse Jews testify to the oneness and uniqueness of their God—a difference in both quantity and quality from polytheism...As a watchword of faith and faithfulness the *Shema* constitutes the climax of the saying recited before death. This declaration was also used during martyrdom. Jesus identified the *Shema* as the first commandment in the law (Mark 12/29)."

called attention to the difference between the Catholic and Protestant understanding of faith. Mention can also be made of the Thirty-Nine Articles which represent the position held by the Church of England not only in opposition to the Catholic Church but also to others (e.g. Calvinists, Anabaptists).³ Such confessions are not referred to as creeds.

At the time of the Hitler era, the Confessing Church put out what is a faith understanding of the gospel and it paid dearly for its courageous witness to authentic Christianity. The Barmen Declaration (1934) which reflected the theological stance of Karl Barth (1886-1968) affirmed the stance of this Church in opposition to the compromises made by the 'German Christians' in favour of Nazism. In the 20th century, the Ecumenical Movement attempted to find common ground among the different Christian denominations after it had received its initial momentum in the Edinburgh Conference (1910). The need for a common agreement on matters touching the missions, church practice and even doctrine gave rise to the Lima Document (1982) that sought to identify areas of consensus in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Declarations and consensus documents are not considered creeds.

Faith Statements in the Catholic Tradition

The Catholic Tradition is closely linked with a history which it believes is the concrete expression of the great deeds of God (*magnalia Dei*).

Christianity is first of all a historical religion, not simply in the sense that it has a history but in its conviction that God has decisively acted and made himself known in history. The great creedal affirmations of the Old and the New Testaments are recitals of and reflections upon the historic events in which God is believed to have disclosed himself.

The great creeds, however, are not only rooted in history as their source and basis, but they are also framed in history and bear the marks of history. Generally speaking, creeds have not been written in the quiet periods of history but in those moments of historical

3 E. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Editors): *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ODCC), 3rd edition, Oxford, 1997, p 1611.

intensity when the Church has been engaged by foes from without, or when its mission or life has been endangered from within.⁴

Already in the second century, one finds statements or affirmations testifying to the “common” beliefs of Christian communities. These were faith pronouncements made about the triune God and taught to the catechumens who were being instructed to receive baptism. These were referred to as baptismal creeds and were ‘interrogatory’ in form.

In addition, one comes across criteria that are meant to authenticate the essentials of the Christian (apostolic) faith. These were referred to as the Rule of Faith (*Regula Fidei*).

Rule of Faith...One of the names used to describe outline statements of Christian belief which circulated in the 2nd-cent. Church and were designed to make clear the essential contents of the Christian faith, to serve as guides in the exegesis of Scripture (e.g. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.9.4), and to distinguish the orthodox tradition from the traditions to which the heretics appealed. Alternative names were the ‘rule of truth’, the ‘law of faith’ or the ‘norm...of truth’. Unlike creeds, which came later, these formularies varied in wording, though it was claimed that they faithfully reflected New Testament teaching, and did not differ from one another in their essential content. This content was held to have descended unchanged from apostolic times, in contrast to the spurious traditions of the heretics, which were taken to be later developments and mutually incompatible.⁵

The Vincentian Canon is an example of a Rule of Faith: “what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.”⁶

Dogmas also qualify as statements of faith. They are proclaimed when the Church decides that a clear teaching is called for in a serious matter concerning the faith of the Church. Such a teaching ensures that the faith of the apostolic church is preserved intact. The way in which

4 John H. Leith (Editor): *Creeds of the Churches*, A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present, Garden City, 1963, p 2.

5 ODCC, p 1424.

6 ODCC, p 1700: “*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum*”.

dogma was understood in the 19th century owes much to Philip Neri Christmann (1751-1840).

In his *Regula fidei catholicae* (1792), Christmann states: "A dogma of the faith is nothing other than a divinely revealed doctrine and truth, which is proposed in a public judgment of the Church as something to be believed by divine faith, in such a way that the contrary is condemned by the Church as a heretical doctrine." Not only a formal decision but a teaching universally accepted in the Church was included by Christmann in the category of such "public" judgments. Christmann's narrow definition of dogma was viewed at the time as too minimalistic, and his book was placed on the Index in 1869. Yet, surprisingly, his understanding of dogma was generally accepted in nineteenth century theology and by Vatican I.⁷

The purpose of dogmatic statements is to set out clearly the teaching of the Church *magisterium* as regards a particular doctrine or aspect of the faith that is misinterpreted; creeds have a larger function even though at times a dogmatic definition may be included in a creed.

Creedal Statements

The origin of creedal statements is found in baptismal catechesis. During the period of instruction, the catechumen would have articles of faith explained and later on would be asked to declare his/her faith by reciting a declaratory profession of faith that summarized what he/she had been taught. Baptism followed. (In today's rite of baptism, the profession of faith precedes the rite of baptism proper.) At first, the baptismal formula was short and direct and had a Christological emphasis affirming the unique status of Jesus (Rom 10/9); later, the formula was expanded to include both clarifications and a fuller understanding of the Jesus Christ event (Phil 2/11); and still later the Trinitarian profession of faith was used (Mt 28/19-20). Additions to the existing creedal formulas were made by church synods or councils when the existing formulas were interpreted incorrectly and used to support heterodox doctrine. One such heterodox doctrine was noted in the fourth century: Arianism.

7 Thomas B. Ommen: *The Hermeneutic of Dogma*, Missoula, 1975, pp 70-71.

Not until the Arians had attempted to make Christ a kind of demi-god had the doctrine of the Trinity been defined; not until Appolinarianism, Nestorianism and Eutychianism had run their course was the Church's Christological faith defined.⁸

A variety of (declaratory) creedal statements have existed in the Church.⁹ These statements were made at different times to affirm the meaningfulness of God's salvific act on behalf of humankind at different stages of human history. For instance, to commemorate the 19th century of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, Pope Paul VI closed the year of faith 1967-68 with a profession of faith - referred to as the creed of Paul VI - which, the pope said, "repeats in substance the Creed of Nicaea, with some development called for by the spiritual condition of our times."¹⁰ However, among the many creedal statements that exist, pride of place is given to the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed because of historical and dogmatic reasons. These are recited today at the Sunday liturgy, solemnities and on special occasions, e.g. when a bishop takes charge of his diocese. The Nicene Creed was the first to be affirmed by an ecumenical council and continues to be the standard of orthodoxy in the East and the West.

Creeds were also referred to as 'symbols of faith'. Seen as passwords used by the initiated, they were kept secret and told only to believers.¹¹ The Greek *symbolon* could mean token and its function could be seen as identifying "God, the believer, and the community of belief."¹²

The Greek word *symbolon* meant half of a broken object, for example, a seal presented as a token of recognition. The broken parts were placed together to verify the bearer's identity. The

8 Alan Richarson: *Creeds in the Making*, London, 1969, p 82.

9 Jacques Dupuis (Editor): *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (J. Neuner-J. Dupuis), 7th revised and enlarged edition, Bangalore, 2004, "Symbols and Professions of Faith," pp 3-31.

10 Neuner-Dupuis, pp 23-4.

11 J. N. D. Kelly: *Early Christian Creeds*, London, New York, Toronto, first published in 1950, 2nd impression, pp 51-2. (JND Kelly)

12 Richard P. McBrien (General Editor): *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, New York, 1995, p 378. Also, refer JND Kelly, p 54.

symbol of faith, then, is a sign of recognition and communion between believers.¹³

The Nicene Creed

The Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 was called by the emperor Constantine (d. 337). He had decided to Christianize the Roman Empire. Before him “in 311 Galerius...had issued the Edict of Serdica granting freedom of worship to all Christians.”¹⁴ Christianity was to be the unifying factor in the empire but around the year 318 this unity was challenged by Arianism. Arius (d. 336) was a priest in charge of Baucalis, one of the important churches in Alexandria.¹⁵ He held the doctrine that denied the divinity of the Son, Jesus Christ.

Arius appears to have held that the Son of God was not eternal but created before the ages by the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world; He was therefore not God by nature, but a creature, and so susceptible of change, even though different from all other creatures in being the one direct creation of God; His dignity as Son of God was bestowed on Him by the Father on account of his foreseen abiding righteousness...a major objective of the Arians was to distinguish the Divinity of the Father from that of the Son in order to express the Incarnation of Christ in a way which did not ascribe the limitations of the Incarnate Son to the full Divinity which they attributed uniquely to the Father.¹⁶

It was not as though the Fathers in Nicaea composed a whole new creedal formula from scratch. In fact they used an existing baptismal formula but added some crucial changes to it. The term used by the council to deny the heresy of the Arian doctrine of Christ not being divine was *homoousios*, a Greek term that is translated as “the same substance” or “consubstantial”. To say that Jesus Christ is of the same substance as the Father is to affirm his divinity. There was some hesitation in using this term since it is not found in the scriptures but it would seem that the emperor Constantine favoured it as affirming the orthodox faith.

14 Michael Grant: *The Roman Emperors*, A Biographical Guide to the Rulers of Imperial Rome, 31BC—AD 476, New York, 1985, pp. 230-1.

15 ODCC, p 104.

16 ODCC, p 99.

But it also allowed a good bit of latitude for interpretation by those participating in the deliberations of Nicaea. This latitude was used to read into the council's statement accommodation for unorthodox professions of faith. It was a short formula and ended with four anathemas against the Arians. However, the Arian interpretations that continued after 325 made it necessary to call another council to see if the orthodox Nicene faith (anti-Arianism) would be professed by all Christian Churches in the Roman Empire.

It is not clear which baptismal creed was used in Nicaea in preparing its creed. Many would agree with Hans Lietzmann (1875-1942) who claimed that Nicaea probably used the local baptismal creed of Jerusalem. Further, the creed that we usually refer to as the Nicene Creed—which is recited on Sundays—is not the one that was produced in Nicaea. What we refer to today as the Nicene Creed is the one endorsed by the ecumenical council that met in Constantinople in 381. Some think that the baptismal creed of Constantinople was the original text.¹⁷

The Constantinopolitan Creed seems to have been established as a baptismal creed in the capital and its environs during the mid-5th century. Reaffirmed at Chalcedon, it was considered a complete and definitive form of the Nicene Creed...and became the standard baptismal creed of the Eastern Churches.¹⁸

The Constantinopolitan Creed was the outcome of the First Council of Constantinople in 381 that was called by Theodosius I, the Roman emperor from 379-395. He himself professed the faith based on the Nicene Creed and wished to bring together all Christians, even those who sympathized with Arianism.¹⁹ During the council Apollinarianism was condemned. But it would be many years before the Nicene Creed attained universal acclaim as the orthodox profession of faith.

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed is an expanded form of the 'Old Roman Creed' which itself was formed by the end of the second century.²⁰ It was used

17 ODCC, p 1146.

18 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 4, 2nd edition, Gale, 2003, p 354.

19 Michael Grant, p 272.

20 HARPER, p 932, "Old Roman Creed, a short, Trinitarian confession that originated

as the baptismal creed of Rome and is similar to the baptismal creed found in The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus (c. 170-c. 236). It was mentioned by Ambrose (c.339-97) around 390. Its contents have a scriptural basis but it is not the product of the apostles. Tyrannius Rufinus (c. 345-411) wrote a commentary on the Apostles' Creed (*Commentarius in symbolum apostolorum*) which included the Latin text of the creed used in Rome.²¹ The legend given us by Rufinus that the apostles met and each of the twelve contributed an article to the creed has long since been discarded.

The Apostles' Creed is used today during the administering of baptism and can be used in place of the Nicene Creed. It was universally acknowledged in the West by the early Middle Ages and was imposed by Charlemagne (c. 742-814) throughout his empire.

Professing a Creedal Faith in the Church

1. The creeds are the Church's confession of faith. When stating how divine revelation is transmitted from generation to generation, *Dei Verbum* 8 says: "...the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes." The Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed are the symbols of faith that contribute to the authentic transmitting of the Apostolic Tradition. Individual and personal confessions of faith remain genuine expressions of Christian piety when they are in tune with these symbols of faith. The very word creed can be traced back to the Latin *credo* that "implies commitment, the giving of one's heart or self to someone or something."²²

2. The creeds possess the essential content of Christian faith succinctly. From New Testament times, we find baptismal creeds in tripartite fashion being explained to the catechumen. It is from these baptismal creeds that the major creeds (Nicene and Apostles' Creeds) obtain their faith content. They were introduced into the liturgy so that people would hear them often and learn them.

in the Church of Rome in approximately A.D. 150 and eventually developed into the Apostles' Creed." ODCC, p 1181, "Old Roman Creed ...at least from the end of the 2nd century was the official baptismal creed of the Church of Rome."

21 ECC, pp101-2.

22 Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane (Editors): *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Collegeville, 1991, p 260.

3. All language that expresses divine realities is symbolic (or metaphorical) and is time-bound and culture-specific. Hence there is need to begin with the original text of the creeds to cull out their meaningfulness and then investigate their significance in contexts where persons live their life of faith. If this is not done, the recitation of the creed may offer a person the emotional satisfaction of being in touch with the Church's patrimony, but it will tend to be ritualistic. "To say the Creed with faith is to enter into communion with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and also with the whole Church which transmits the faith to us and in whose midst we believe..."²³

4. The creeds have ecumenical potential. All Christian Churches and denominations affirm the Nicene Creed. The study of the creed could be the first step in ecumenical dialogue. The chances are that the Catholic will discover that different faith traditions can bring a greater richness to his/her own faith. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Decree on Ecumenism, no. 4 says "Whatever is truly Christian is never contrary to what genuinely belongs to the faith; indeed, it can always bring a more perfect realization of the very mystery of Christ and the Church."

5. A common confession of faith would help in bringing about unity among the different churches in Christianity. The effort to arrive at such a confession would help to understand more deeply the ancient apostolic faith.

In 1975 the Assembly of the WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES meeting in Nairobi urged member churches "to undertake a common effort to receive, reappropriate and confess together, as contemporary occasion requires, the Christian truth and faith, delivered through the Apostles and handed down through the centuries." In response the Commission on Faith and Order initiated a project...[which] had three goals: 1) the common recognition of the apostolic faith as expressed in the Ecumenical Symbol of that faith, the Nicene Creed; 2) the common explication of this apostolic faith in contemporary situations of the churches; and 3) a common confession of the apostolic faith today.²⁴

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23 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Theological Publications in India and the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India, 1994, no. 197, pp 42-3.

24 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 4, The Catholic University of America, Thomson/Gale, 2003, p 355.

Editorial

From time to time it is good to reflect on the meaning of our faith *in* Jesus and its implications and challenges of our life because an unreflected faith is neither worth living nor life-enhancing. In the Year of Faith it is all the more important to see whether our faith in Jesus is an adult faith which liberates and helps us to unfold ourselves as authentic humans and urges us to commit ourselves to the liberation of others. The liberation that faith leads us to is the wholeness of humans and their society and the world in which they live. Faith is essential to humans as humans. Therefore, it is faith that unites all humans but its expressions in beliefs, doctrines, rituals and worship and the communities that profess the beliefs and practice them that divide humans. In fact our faith in Jesus and its expressions in creed, code, cult and community should not separate Christian believers from the believers who are committed to other faith-expressions. The distinctiveness of faith in Jesus Christ is that all humans form one Body with him because he is God become human. In him all human-made barriers of separation are overcome and there is no Jew or Gentile, no free or slave, no man or woman. By surrendering oneself to this all-embracing and all-comprehensive reality one discovers Jesus as the beginning and the end of his / her life or as the meaning of one's life.

Martin Buber who once said that "faith *of* Jesus unites us but faith *in* Jesus divides us" seemed to have discovered something of the mystery of Jesus when he said, "From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother. That Christianity has regarded and does regard him as God and Savior has always appeared to me a fact of the highest importance which, for his sake and my own, I must endeavour to understand....My own fraternally open relationship to him has grown

ever stronger and clearer, and today I see him more strongly and clearly than ever before. I am more than ever certain that a great place belongs to him in Israel's history of faith and that this place cannot be described by any of the usual categories." In fact, no category of thought, no dogma or doctrine can exhaust the mystery of Jesus Christ who continues to challenge humans to become authentic humans and thus become the glory of God.

In this Year of Faith *Jeevadhara* offers our readers some challenging reflections on the implications of our faith in Jesus Christ. In writing these articles the authors have discussed the theme of their articles with others who could critically respond to the theological reflections shared in these articles and offer suggestions for clarifying or high-lighting some issues related to the main theme.

Thomas Kocherry, in his article "Faith in Jesus: A Passionate Call for Liberation" argues that our faith in Jesus can be understood only in the context of Jewish history. We encounter Jesus Christ through the events of enslavement and liberation, institutionalization and priesthood, temples, gods and idols that were part of Jewish history. Above all, we meet Him in and through the Spirit filled prophetic calls. Though the early Church continued the mission of Jesus as an expression of its faith in Jesus, its prophetic mission lost its cutting edge in the course of time. The call of Vatican II is to recapture the original vision of Jesus and renew our commitment to Jesus and his prophetic mission.

Errol D'Lima reflects on the implications of faith in Jesus for the mission of the Church. In his article, "Jesus Christ and a Witnessing Church" he emphasizes the need for a deeper personal and communitarian experience of the Person of Jesus so that the witnessing of the Church about the mystery and meaning of Jesus Christ becomes credible and effective. Faith in Jesus Christ is an experience of transcendence where a person is taken beyond his/her own limitations of creaturely existence and lives out the values of the Kingdom of God. It is a gift from above but involves one's commitment and relationship with others. It is both

personal and communitarian. It becomes alive when a person recognizes, accepts and commits himself/herself to the continuing presence of the saving action of God in Jesus Christ in the Church. The Church itself becomes a prophetic presence that represents both God's offer of salvation and humankind's response in faith.

Patricia Santos in her article, "Faith in Jesus and Its Implication for the Liberation of Women" argues that our faith in Jesus without commitment to liberation especially of the poor and marginalized is hollow and meaningless. Our faith in Jesus must propel us to promote life in all its forms. Although women have been excluded and oppressed in the name of Jesus and religion, they find meaning, strength and comfort in identifying with Jesus the Christ who is encountered as the true liberator. Jesus manifests God's all-inclusive love and goodness to all persons especially women, the weak and the poor. Jesus' faith in his Abba was so deep, personal and intimate that he was comfortable in using both male and female metaphors and images to convey God's all-inclusive and all-recognizing relationship with humans.

Ishanand Vempeny discusses in detail the implications of our faith in Jesus Christ in the context of religious pluralism in his article "Inter-religious Dialogue vis-à-vis Faith in Jesus Christ." He argues that our faith in Jesus Christ must find expression in our commitment to live and proclaim the values of the Kingdom that Jesus preached during his earthly life. The Kingdom of God ideal can easily resonate with the World Family ideal of Indian culture and religious traditions. Therefore, it is in honest dialogue with the religious and cultural traditions that value the world-family ideal and in solidarity with those who are committed to that ideal that our faith in Jesus Christ finds new expressions and renewed commitment for the transformation of persons and societies.

Our faith in Jesus demands from us a life of commitment to concretize the values of love, justice, peace, equality, fellowship, reconciliation and so on wherever we are. Jesus who is 'the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Heb 12:2) gave up his life rather than the values he believed in as

an expression of his faith in his Father which involved his commitment to the Kingdom values. Our faith in Jesus demands such a commitment to him and communion with him and others in actualizing the values of the Kingdom.

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Faith in Jesus: A Passionate Call for Liberation

Thomas Kocherry

Faith in Jesus can be understood only in the context of Jewish history of faith. The apostles, disciples and all those who believed in Jesus lived and proclaimed his life and message. In fact, Jesus' life was his message. From birth to death He owned no private property. He totally depended on God, who was the fullness of life.. We cannot be satisfied with repeating what Jesus said; we should analyze our times in the same spirit that He had analyzed His times. Faith in Jesus clearly demands moving away from ritualism and dogmas towards liberation experience and prophetic proclamation. We are told that the Disciples of Jesus broke these rituals in front of the critical eyes of the Pharisees. In fact, Jesus came to fulfil the law and to recapture the original, radical dimension of the Sabbath law (Mt. 12:18). Though the early Church continued the mission of Jesus as an expression of its faith in Jesus, its prophetic mission lost its cutting edge in the course of time. The focus of the Church was turned towards quantity rather than quality. Rituals and dogmas replaced faith in Jesus. Formal mass, baptism and other sacraments became popular ways of practicing their Christian faith. Egyptian Monks were part of a protest movement, which was followed by the Monastic movement. Gradually more Religious groups came into being, vowing to the evangelical radicalism. However these too got institutionalised and they lost their original vision. The Vatican II challenged all these institutions to 'return to the sources' — to understand and adhere to the original vision and commitment. It is in this context that we must consider our Faith in Jesus today.

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Introduction

This is the 'Year of Faith' and therefore a reflection on the faith in Jesus is very relevant. Faith in Jesus can be understood only in the context of Jewish history. We encounter Jesus Christ through the events of enslavement and liberation, institutionalisation and priesthood, temples, gods and idols that were part of Jewish history. Above all, we meet Him in and through the Spirit filled prophetic calls. Yahweh was the only God of the Israelites. Yahweh has no image. Yahweh is Spirit. Israelites lived among people who worshipped many gods and idols. They had no kings in the beginning, but always wanted to have kings and temples. They were enslaved by pagan kings and lived as slaves. In order to comprehend our faith in Jesus, we must reinterpret the Old Testament (OT) from the perspective of Jesus and attempt to understand the God of Genesis, Abraham, Moses, Isaac, Jacob, the Temple, and Prophets in the way Jesus did.

I. Progressive History of Faith

1. Creation and the Fall

Creation embodied the beauty of God, and we have been called to be co-creators with God. The "fall" in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time was a radical shift from our original trust in God, and of living and working with God to our taking control of our lives and managing it our way. In modern times, we describe this as "civilization" where sinister powers rule the world. This so called civilization is an exclusive expression of profiteering consumerism of a few at the expense of the vast majority. The forces of globalization, neo-liberalism and militarism are manifestations of these powers that have transformed us into such selfish consumers, destroyers of nature and life. God has given us life which, however small it is, cannot be taken away by the state or any human

structure. Jesus came to free us from these powers and principalities and reestablish our trust in God. Jesus promises that when we first seek the Kingdom of God, our food, drink and clothing (the things we need) will be provided to us.

2. Call of Abraham

God called Abraham around 1450 B.C.: “Leave your country, your people and your fathers, household, and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you, I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and the people on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:1-3). Through his obedience to God’s call, a new community of believers was established. Yahweh was present in the community. They experienced Yahweh’s abiding presence by carrying the Scroll of the Ten Commandments with them wherever they lived. Slavery was considered to be a source of division and sin. Holiness meant unity and freedom from division and slavery. However the Israelites were made slaves by other kings. They wanted to have their own kings, idols and temples. In the midst of these struggles, Yahweh continued to remain as the only God in Spirit. In this context, slavery, idol worship, temples, and gods were seen as sin. Holiness implied unity and adherence to Yahweh’s will. However Jesus also wanted to convert the den of thieves into the House of God.(Mt.21)

3. Call of Moses

The Israelites continued to live in oppression. In 1250 B.C. Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob chose and appointed Moses to liberate the Israelites from the Egyptian slavery (Ex.3:1-22). Yahweh led them from Egypt towards the Promised Land. However, they did not embrace freedom. Instead, they created a golden calf and started worshipping it. The Israelites soon got fed up with the manna God gave them and went to the extent of complaining to Moses that they would rather go back to Egypt and its fleshpots. Moses was frustrated and requested Yahweh to spare him from this call of leading a stubborn and stiff-necked people. At this, Yahweh told Moses to bring with him 70 elders. Yahweh took his spirit and gave it to all the elders saying that from then on they would be a team – a community, sharing the burdens of each other (Num: 11). Here we understand that sin was slavery and

idol worship. Holiness, instead, was team work, community building, liberation from slavery, and worship of Yahweh in Spirit. Jesus came to recapture this spirit of liberation - "let the people go".(Ex.5:1-3)

4. Sabbath

Sabbath was created for the freedom of slaves, who had no rest but were forced to work all the seven days of the week. With the inauguration of Sabbath law they were given a day of rest. Every 7th year would be called sabbatical year, and the slaves got to rest the whole year. Along with them, the land too got rest -sustaining creation. The produce of the land could be taken by the slaves for their consumption. Every 50th year was to be a Jubilee Year, the acceptable year of the Lord, when all the slaves were freed, their debts written off, and each of them got her/his land back (Lev. 25). Jesus saw His mission as proclaiming this acceptable year of the Lord (Lk.4:18). Unfortunately, once institutionalised, this law of the Sabbath lost its radical nature, reducing itself to a ritual. The ritualistic observance was devoid of the liberating value of the Sabbath. We are told that the Disciples of Jesus broke these rituals in front of the critical eyes of the Pharisees. In fact, Jesus came to fulfil the law and to recapture the original, radical dimension of the Sabbath law (Mt.12:18).

5. Jerusalem Temple

The demand of the Israelites to have kings to rule over them and to have temples built became more intense as time passed. In 900 BC, Solomon was anointed as the first king of Israel. Later he built the Temple in Jerusalem. The scroll of the Ten Commandments was placed in the Holy of Holies. Although they took pride in this Temple, it became a cause for division among the Israelites. The creation of the Holy of Holies gave rise to the institution of the cultic priesthood. Only two persons were allowed to enter the Holy of Holies — the king and the priest. While men alone were allowed into the main hall, women and children were kept outside the Temple. Male domination and priestly class became very distinct. Naturally, and before long, Jerusalem and the Temple became centres of religious and political powers. Thousands of priests were involved in offering worship at the Temple and they formed part of the money making racket (1 Kings: 1, 6, 7, 8,). Jesus did

not come in this line of ritualistic priesthood. He was a layman in the context of Jewish religion. But He became the High Priest for all, when he accepted death on the cross, in obedience to the will of the Father and as a prophetic call. Priesthood of the Church should be in this line of Jesus: a Prophet for liberation.

6. Classical Prophets

The prophets of the Old Testament protested against the institutionalised, powerful, and priestly Jerusalem, resulting in their martyrdom. They were spokespersons for Justice and freedom to the poor and the slaves (Is.10:1-4). Isaiah spoke against Jerusalem (Is.22). He warned against the priests and the Temple (Is.28:7-22). His was a voice of liberation (Is.61:1-2). In fact, all the prophets were champions of Justice (Is.65.17-25) and the forerunners of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. Jeremiah invited the Israelites to repent (Jer.3:6-13). If not, Jerusalem would be destroyed, he said (Jer.21:1-10). The destruction of Jerusalem became a reality (Jer.52:1-34). Ezekiel too declared punishment for Jerusalem (Ez.9). Hosea demanded repentance (Hos.14). Joel's call for repentance was directly addressed to the priests (Joel 1:13-20). Such a call for repentance was again repeated by Amos (Amos 5:1-9). Jonah was a prophet who was exclusive and elusive but God demanded him to be inclusive by accepting the people of Nineveh and preaching to them to repent. It signified not only a conversion of the people of Nineveh but also of Jonah himself. He needed an attitudinal change required to accept and include them as people chosen by God (Jon: 1,2,3,4). John the Baptist came as the final link in this long line of prophets. He had to "prepare the way of the Lord" - the Prophet *par excellence* - Jesus.

7. Faith in Jesus - Indications

What I have narrated above is a preparation to dive into the depths of Faith in Jesus. Jesus was born in a manger, as a migrant (Lk.2:1-7). He had to run away to Egypt in order to escape from being murdered by Herod (Mt.2:13-18). He grew up under the care of His parents, who were well versed in the OT (Lk.2:41-52). He was faced with temptations prior to the declaration of His Mission. He proclaimed his mission – promise of an all inclusive freedom for all – the acceptable 'Year of the

Lord' (Lk.4:18). He challenged every one to seek the Kingdom and its justice. Those who accept the challenge would receive everything else in fullness (Mt. 6:33).

His mission, the proclamation of the Kingdom, led Him to face opposition from religious and political leaders of His time (Mt. 23). Though He was innocent, He was sentenced to the biggest political punishment of being crucified on a cross between two notorious criminals (Mt.27:11-26). His crucifixion and death ended in victory as He rose again, defeating sin and death (Mt.28). The acute pain of separation experienced in the face of death ought to lead us to an even more acute sense of expectancy and faith, and a more intensively burning love towards Christ, who suffered but overcame death through His resurrection.

The apostles, disciples and all those who believed in Jesus lived and proclaimed His life and message. In fact, His life was His message. From birth to death He owned no private property. He totally depended on God, who gave Him the fullness of life, as promised (Mt.6:24-33). We cannot be satisfied with repeating what Jesus said; we should analyze our times in the same spirit that He had analyzed His times. "We are called to preach the Gospel ever anew, Renewed Hope, Renewed Hearts, Renewed Structures for Mission."¹

8. People's Movements of Freed Slaves: Early Church and Martyrs up to 200 AD

Jesus' followers were known as Christians, which meant people who were willing to die, like the Master. They lived as a closely knit community and shared everything in common. They remembered the Master at the breaking of the bread and in the narration of His stories and words (Acts 4:32-35). They were arrested and jailed (Acts 5:17-20). They feared no one. Stephen was stoned to death for his adherence to Jesus (Acts 7:54-60). Paul, the enemy of Jesus was converted to become a great apostle (Acts 8:1-9). The Christians became a big challenge to the Romans. There was no institutional Church until 200 AD. "In fact, every thing the church owned at that time belonged to the

1. CSSR XXIV General Chapter Theme.

poor. The affairs of the poor were the affairs of the church; it supported bereft women and children, the sick, and the destitute. This love made even the Christian women of rank give away their property and become beggars.² The priests came into being as part of necessity as teachers and leaders of the church, who dedicated their life to help others. They were there to guide and console the living Church – the people. They presided over the breaking of the Word and the Bread, which was a way to remember and relive Christ, His life and message.

9. Gradual Institutionalisation

In 325 AD, the conversion of the Roman Emperor marked a turning point as it led to the institutionalisation of the life of Christians. Baptism became common (Rom.6:1-11). The Church assumed a hierarchical and male dominated structure. Pope, Bishops and priests came into existence though in the case of Peter, it was the strong faith in Jesus made him the leader of the people who followed Jesus (Mt.16:13-19). Cathedrals and churches multiplied. Royal attires began to be used by the Pope and the Bishops. The focus of the Church was turned towards quantity rather than quality. Rituals and dogmas replaced faith in Jesus. Formal mass, baptism and other sacraments became popular ways of practicing their Christian faith. Egyptian Monks were part of a protest movement, which was followed by the Monastic movement. Gradually more Religious groups came into being, vowing to the evangelical radicalism. However these too got institutionalised and they lost their original vision. The Vatican II challenged all these institutions to 'return to the sources' — to understand and adhere to the original vision and commitment. It is in this context that we must consider our Faith in Jesus today.

II. Faith in Jesus as a Liberating Force

1. The Context: Globalization, Capitalism

We are part of a world that is focussed on economic globalization and capitalism. Globalization means free movement of Capital. It facilitates amassing of profits by a few at the expense of the vast majority

² Justin, *First Apology* 67; Macarius Magnes, *Apocriticus* III.5; Porphyry Fragment No. 58 in Harnack's edition, p. 82; Harnack ET, vol. 2, pp. 74–75; *Didascalia* XV; Connolly, p. 138; Julian, *Sozomen*, V.17; Harnack ET, vol. 1, p. 162.

of people who do not have even the basic needs in life. Urge to amass wealth has led to unjust ways and means. In the process, justice, morality, labour laws, and respect for environment are thrown to the winds. Corruption and price rise are thus linked with globalization. Worst of all, even the Church services have become money making rackets. Education and Health care are turned into profit making businesses.

The amassing of wealth by a few billionaires has been protected by the powerful forces of the state. Nuclear plants churn out nuclear waste and weapons of mass destruction are used as ways to protect the wealth of the rich. The vast majority are slowly being killed by these unjust structures that are controlled by corrupt and inhumane leaders of the world. This is the biggest violence in the world today. When the victims confront the unjust systems with arms they are termed as terrorists. When the State suppresses these violent movements, it is called war on terrorism. Peace is possible only if all violence is put to an end. That will be the dawning of the Reign of God. This is the Kingdom of God that Jesus envisioned and came to inaugurate.

2. Prophetic Call in the Institutional Church

We need to understand the prophetic calls within the institutional Church. The responses to this call by these great men and women of the Church, especially Stephen, Paul, the Apostles, Martyrs, Francis of Assisi, Archbishop Romero, Sr. Rani Maria, Sr. Valsa John, Fr. A.T. Thomas, Graham Steines and his two sons, the Martyrs of Kandhamal, Fr. Roy Bourgeois MM, Fr. Tony Flannery, Dr. Martin Luther King stand out as examples before us today. What we need today is the courage to live and express our faith in Jesus as each of them did. Jesus warned his disciples: "On my account you will be brought before governors and kings...All people will hate you because of me" (Mt. 10:18, 22). And so it happened and continues to happen to all those who uncompromisingly follow Him. Like Roy Bourgeois we have to express our faith in Jesus through Liberative Actions - "Liberation theology recognizes and responds to a loving God who does not want anyone to suffer from poverty, oppression, violence, or discrimination".³ The Church of today is not the

³. Roy B., *My Journey*, MM p.. 4.

Church of Christ if it does not demonstrate the courage to protest against the evils that are going on today.

We have only one Master. Books on rituals and dogmas are not of the true masters. This is very well expressed by the great Sadhu Sundar Singh: The Master never wrote anything down, nor did he ask his followers to record his teachings. His words are spirit and life. Spirit can only infuse spirit. Life can only infuse life. The Master's teaching cannot be contained on the pages of a book. Other great teachers left behind books to replace the living voice, to guide and help their bereft followers. But the Master did not do this, because he has not left us. He is always with us, and his living voice guides and counsels us. His followers recorded his teachings after his ascension as a help to those who cannot yet perceive his living presence. In the end, however, when people ask me, "What made you a follower of the Master?", I can only answer: "the Master".⁴

It is obvious then that we need a faith in Jesus lived as a prophetic call for liberation. We cannot continue to use rituals and dogmas without seeking the Kingdom and its justice, without bringing about the "acceptable year of the Lord". Sr. Valsa John was murdered because she stood with the tribals and their rights. She was murdered by the MNCs who were exploiting the tribals in Jharkhand. What is important is to create a vibrant, radical and revolutionary movement that remain energetic, radical and revolutionary.

3. Class Contradiction and Liberation

All around the world, there are several millions of victims of globalization who have organised themselves against the evils of globalization and they are fighting for justice and freedom. Over ten million fisher people are part of the 'National Fish Workers Forum' fighting against the import of 2660 deep sea industrial fishing vessels, resulting in stopping the import of these destructive vessels. This was one of the biggest victories against globalization in the world. The temptation for power, wealth and the use of short cuts was also faced by Jesus, as we do today (Lk.4:1-12). We have to overcome these

⁴ Available at <http://www.plough.com/en/ebooks/w/wisdom-of-the-sadhu>

temptations through people's movements. We have to seek the Kingdom so that all the basic needs will be given to us (Mt.6:24-34).

In Odisha, the victims of SEZ have been fighting against the Multi National Companies under the banner of POSCO. The fight is against the acquisition of their land for a South Korean MNC. For the past six years people have been fighting to protect their land, the only source of their livelihood and without much success so far.

Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) has been fighting against the Sardar Sarovara dam for the past 25 years, creating awareness among the people against the dangers of big dams. Millions of poor people are displaced putting their livelihood at stake.

About 1 million landless dalits marched from Gwalior to Delhi, demanding implementation of Land Reform as mandated by the Indian Constitution. It was finally settled by the State to provide land to all the landless within a year. The work is progressing. Similarly in Chengara, Kerala the landless occupied an Estate for about two years. Finally it was settled by the Government to give 25 cents land to each of the families involved.

There are many movements in India: National Alliance of Peoples Movements (NAPM), Fisher Peoples Movements (NFF) (WFFP), Peasants Movements, Adivasi Movements, Women's Movements, Construction Workers Movements, and several trade unions around the world working towards a better and classless society. Many of these struggles are secular in nature, we experience the reign of God in each of these struggles, working towards the realization of the Kingdom of God and its justice. It is here that our faith in Jesus becomes real and tangible. This is the venue for seeking belief in the so called "non-believers" and unbelief in the so called "believers". We should be able to find truth and goodness in other faiths, religions and movements, and we should be able to find our weakness through self criticism.

4. Community Building without Private Property

In 1857, the Chief of the Whites from Washington came to Seattle to meet the Chief of the Red Indians, he brought with him gold in order

to buy land from the natives. The Red Indians asked: "How could you buy air? The Creator created the Planet, land, water and air, meant for all humanity. It is crime if you amass land and water". In 1857, the British enacted the law legitimising all the conquered land as private property. It is a denial of God the Creator if we amass the land that actually belongs to all who have no land. It is time that through People's Movements we proclaim the 'acceptable year of the Lord' (Lk.4:18), the Jubilee year (Lev.25).

Jesus opened up the struggle against private property. He himself had left all that was His own; He had abandoned all privileges and given up all He possessed in order to go the way of love and sacrifice (Mat. 8:20). He is our example because He wanted no property. From the manger to the Cross, He was the poorest. Gather no treasure for yourselves, gather no property; instead, store up something different for yourselves, that is, the love of your fellows. Let go of money, the perishable wealth, and instead take hold of imperishable wealth; then you will be rich. (Mt. 6:19-20).⁵ If we are true followers of Jesus we would be like Jesus. We should be poor like Jesus.

5. Gender Inequality and Liberation

The gender contradictions in the Church and the society have become a burning issue today and everyone is part of this. Jyothy Singh Pande has become the heroine of today in the hearts of youth. The ideal paradigm is that of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman. We need to create a society of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (Jn.4:1-16), respecting one another like sister and brother.

The committee, which was tasked with suggesting legal reforms to deal with sexual assault cases, however said the minimum sentence for a rapist should be enhanced from 7 years to 10 and that life imprisonment must always mean jail for 'the entire natural life of the convict'. It has also recommended forming a new constitutional authority like the CAG for dealing with issues related to education and non-discrimination of women and children.

⁵ Arnold, Oct. 1931, at <http://www.plough.com/en/ebooks/g/gods-revolution>

Presenting the report on 'Amendments to Criminal Law', Mr. Verma said at a time when there are talks of abolishing the death sentence, the committee has "enhanced the punishment to mean the remainder of life". An overwhelming majority of scholars and women's organisations told the committee they were strongly against death penalty.⁶

Anti-AFSPA champion Irom Sharmila had been charged with attempting to commit suicide by launching a fast unto death at Jantar Mantar in 2006. Ms. Sharmila had undertaken an indefinite fast since November 4, 2000 demanding repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. In the national capital, she hogged the limelight with over 40 foreign newspapers and electronic media taking her interviews while she stayed in Delhi. She conveyed to journalists her disappointment at people not coming out openly to support her campaign.⁷

Rape of the Earth and the Rape of women are intimately linked. The vulnerability is on the increase. This is what we see around us daily. The Capitalist mode of production based on growth is killing the earth and women in the world today. Ending violence upon women includes moving beyond the violent economy shaped by capitalist patriarchy to non-violent peaceful, economies which give respect to women and earth.

Women's priesthood in the Church has to be understood in the context of gender equality. "Doesn't the call to the priesthood come from God? Who are we, as men, to reject God's call to women?." I feel that the Pope and theologians generally accept that there is no theological difficulty in ordaining women, but only the tradition in the Church makes it barrier in acting in favour of women. What a pity, that we are tied down by the tradition, rather than motivated by the Word of God! It is very consoling that there are numerous women's movements fighting gender inequality in the world today. The Church should pay heed to their struggles.

6. Caste Contradiction and Liberation

Caste disparity has been going on in India for centuries. Urge to amass wealth has led to unjust ways and means. The struggle goes on

⁶ *The Hindu*, 24-1-2013

⁷ *The Hindu*, 6th March 2013

⁸ Roy B, *My Journey*, MM P.16

for centuries. Of course the need for reservation in jobs and education to the people of lower castes is understandable as it offers them opportunities for professional growth. We need to encourage inter-caste marriages all over India. Caste mixing in schools/educational institutions is very important.

The many movements working to restore equality in our society also concentrate on education as a process of empowerment. They work to secure the rights of admission to schools, drawing water from the public wells, entering temples and using roads. Christians are beyond all customs, caste, race and colour (Rom. 7:1-6). The words of Truth from Ambedkar to the dalits are themselves liberating: "My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is battle for freedom. It is the battle of reclamation of human personality".⁹

7. Environmental Contradictions and Liberation

The uneven growth model of development due to globalization is associated with pollution and emission of carbon dioxide and directly contributes to the destruction of Ozone layer. This is leading to climate change in the world today. This is the end result of today's growth model development. The ongoing struggles against globalization, corruption and price rise have become global.

Another destruction of environment is due to nuclear plants with all their uncontrollable radiation. Over 50,000 people have been fighting against Koodankulam Nuclear Plant in the state of Tamil Nadu for nearly two years. They are facing hundreds of police cases including sedition charges. They have contributed about 6 million rupees towards the fight against nuclearization. All the expenses are met by the earnings of the fisher people.

Soumya who has grasped the power of such movements, says: Yes we know, in the far south of our nation, "People are writing their own

⁹ *Deccan Herald*, 7 Feb 2013.

salvation, cradled by the sea, caressed by the wind. A brave new India is awaiting coronation.”¹⁰ We are waiting for a new Jerusalem where we have total harmony in nature (Rev.21:1-4). The life of the planet and the dependent health of the whole humanity should not be sacrificed by the greed of a few.

8 . Sacraments and Liberation

Faith in Jesus clearly demands moving away from ritualism and dogmas towards liberation experience and prophetic proclamation. Baptism is a conscious adult decision of one's mission and call. It has to be a liberative call to mission (Mt.3:13-17). Eucharist and priesthood have to be a commitment to the mission and one has to pay the prize for it (Mt.26:26-29). Sacrifice is an indispensable part of the Eucharistic celebration. Jesus was, in his prophethood, priesthood, and kingship, the bearer of a new possibility of human, social and therefore political relationship. His baptism is the start and the cross and resurrection the culmination of the new regime which his disciples are called to share.

Multiplication of loaves in the Gospels is related to the feeding of the hungry (Jn.6:5-14). Jesus is alive fully in these activities. “As long as you did it to the least of my brothers/sisters you did it to me” (Mt.25:31-46). Confirmation is a conscious affirmation and courageous decision of commitment (Rom.8:1-5). Confession is a public admission, reconciling with the community as part of the Eucharist (Mt.6:9-14). Jesus says: “In praying do not heap up empty phrases...Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Mat 6:6-7). And He concludes: “...if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (6:14-15). If this prayer, then, is not a matter of “empty words” to inform God what we need but is a matter of forgiving one another, then it is suggested that it expresses a four-fold relationship: to God, one another, things and to structures. Marriage is an expression of these as a community in the Mission, (Lk.8:19-21), doing the will of the Father. We are asserting that we are saying good bye to come back with a new life. Thus all the sacraments become signs and reality of the reign of God (Lk.17:29-31). Church as people of God is a sign of the Kingdom of God and its Justice.

¹⁰. Soumya Dutta, *A Salutation to the Heroines & Heroes of the Kudankulam Struggle*

9. Exclusive Profit Making Education vs Inclusive Education for all

Christian missionaries were pioneers of education among the poor. But today, education has become a money making business. English Medium schools, and profiteering and Professional colleges are the main interests of Religious orders and dioceses. In 1969, the Church in India Seminar unanimously decided that Church institutions should not take appointment fee, admission fee, and capitation fee. But what is happening today? Our faith in Jesus should take us to an all inclusive education for all with service mentality, not profiteering. This commitment should be in every religious as a characteristic quality of our faith in Jesus. We have to collaborate with the GOI in the free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14, which is a constitutional commitment in India.¹¹

10. Medical Business vs Health Care for all

Dr. Anna Dunkel was the pioneer of Medical service to the poor Muslim women in Rawalpindi, even violating the Canon Law. This was the beginning of Medical Mission Sisters (MMS). As years passed by, the MMS hospitals became big Institutions catering to the rich. After Vatican II, the MMS undertook a socio-economic-political analysis of their institutions and found that they deviated from their original charism. They started giving up their big Hospitals catering to the rich. Unfortunately other Religious Orders started taking up big hospitals. What we need is a Church committed to the Medical field catering to the poor with basic health care. Faith in Jesus demands such prophetic call in the Religious Orders and the Church. We need to collaborate with the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan of the Indian circle of the People's Health Movement, a worldwide movement to establish health and equitable development as top priorities through comprehensive primary health care and action on the social determinants of health.

11. Spirituality of Liberation Struggles

Contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the world that our financial systems, our advertising culture, and our chaotic and unexamined

¹¹ Right to Education Act 2012

emotions encourage us to inhabit. To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly. It is a deeply revolutionary matter. This “internal” transformation is not more important than action for justice, but without it our search for justice or for peace becomes another exercise of human will, undermined by human self-deception. The two callings are inseparable, the calling to “prayer and righteous action”, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, writing from his prison cell in 1944. True prayer purifies the motive. True justice is the necessary work of sharing and liberating in others the humanity we have discovered in our contemplative encounter.

The price missionaries have to pay is the cross. We cannot escape the cross if we are committed to the Mission of Christ (Mt.10:17-25). Cross, sufferings, and martyrdom are the price we have to pay for these struggles for liberation. Jesus’ birth points us ultimately to his death and thus to his resurrection.¹²

“We cannot escape the pain of the Cross .Even when all despaired at the hour when Christ was dying on the cross, Mary, serene, awaited the hour of the resurrection. Mary is the symbol of the people who suffer oppression and injustice. Theirs is the calm suffering that awaits the resurrection. It is Christian suffering”.¹³

Conclusion

“There can be no true liberation until people are freed from sin. All the liberationist groups that spring up in our land should bear this in mind. The first liberation to be proposed by any political group that truly wants the people’s liberation must be to freedom from sin. While one is a slave of sin – of selfishness, violence, cruelty, and hatred – one is not fitted for the people’s liberation.”¹⁴

Let me conclude with the words of the New Pope Francis : Pope Francis said on Saturday that he wanted the *Catholic Church* to be poor

¹² Charles E.Moore at <http://www.plough.com/en/ebooks/w/when-the-time-was-fulfilled>

¹³ *The Violence of Love*, O. Romero: p. 28

¹⁴ Oscar Romero - <http://www.plough.com/en/ebooks/uv/violence-of-love>

and that its mission should be focused on serving the poor. The Pope made his comment in an audience with journalists, explaining why he chose to call himself after St. Francis of Assisi, the saint who is a symbol of peace, austerity and service to the poor. He called Francis "The man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man," and added "How I would like a poor church, and for the poor".¹⁵

Yes, faith in Jesus is a passionate call for Liberation with non-violent means, and being a Suffering Servant. We are at the end of the final battle, caught in the tussle between Life and Death. Remain, then, under God's command. The old world is overthrown and Jesus' Kingdom, it alone, arises from the ruins. May His Kingdom come on earth for all and the Planet!

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¹⁵ 16-3-2013, *The Times of India*

Jesus Christ and a Witnessing Church

Errol D'Lima

The prophetic lifestyle of the early Church attracted many to faith in Jesus Christ. The apostles celebrated their faith in Jesus Christ, not merely by proclaiming a doctrine. What would a prophetic lifestyle mean for today's Church and what would its concrete forms be? The answer to this question can be given only when we reflect on the implication of our faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ is an experience of transcendence where a person is taken beyond his/her own limitations of creaturely existence and lives out the values of the Kingdom of God. It is a gift from above but involves one's commitment and relationship with others. It is both personal and communitarian. It becomes alive when a person recognizes, accepts and commits himself/herself to the continuing presence of the saving action of God in Jesus Christ in the church and the church itself becomes a prophetic presence that represents both God's offer of salvation and humankind's response in faith. The church must update itself in order to be effective in its prophetic mission according to changing situations of the world in the course of history. In our times the implications of the Church's faith in Jesus Christ should be anchored in the teaching of Vatican Council II which stated that its purpose was *aggiornamento*. To be church today is to live its faith-commitment by dialoguing with other faith communities promoting the adulthood of Christian living, working for the poor and the marginalized and by building human communities using the civic space.

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Introduction

In keeping with Romans 3:21-22 where God is seen manifesting his righteousness apart from the law, Paul sees in Jesus Christ the embodiment of God's righteousness which can then be appropriated by human beings. This happens through a person's faith in Jesus Christ.¹ Through this righteousness persons are saved.

In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus God's saving action becomes tangible and visible. The Church is the immediate context in which the presence of God in Jesus Christ is recognized. Its task is to proclaim the visible, concrete and transforming effect of the presence of Jesus Christ in and for the world at large. As seen in Acts of the Apostles, the proclamation of Jesus Christ effected conversion and ended in baptism. The disciples of Jesus were seen as transformed persons who were drawn by the message of Jesus and were passionate to continue his message and ministry. To be his disciple meant not only to follow precepts and principles that were derived from the teaching of Jesus but also to be identified with the person of Jesus - the righteousness that he symbolized. The believing disciples formed communities to express this righteousness in word and deed. Their prophetic lifestyle brought about a numerical increase of the Christian community and set up ecclesial communities in different towns and cities.

The prophetic lifestyle of the early Church attracted many to faith in Jesus Christ. The apostles celebrated their faith in Jesus Christ by proclaiming a person, not merely a doctrine. What they projected in their

¹ Refer Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (editors): *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Theological Publications of India, Bangalore, 1990, 51/38 (Joseph A. Fitzmyer).

daily living could be observed by their listeners. They also paid a price for what they believed in and practised. Such projection and practice attracted others to join them. What would a prophetic lifestyle mean for today's Church and what would its concrete forms be? To answer this question, we begin considering what faith in Jesus Christ implies.

Faith in Jesus Christ

From historical awareness of who Jesus Christ is, a person reaches the point when he/she freely commits him/herself to the person of Jesus Christ. When this happens, the experience of faith envelopes a person and he/she begins to appropriate the righteousness of Jesus - the task of a lifetime. He is the one who brings fulfilment to a person's deepest expectations. Unconditional trust underlines one's relationship with Jesus Christ and he is seen as one on whom a person can rely without fear of betrayal. This entails an appreciation and total acceptance of the other - in the first place Jesus Christ, but also one's neighbour.

An individual discovers that the experience of faith in Jesus Christ is not of his/her own making. It comes from outside of oneself and is a gift of God. It implies a claim on the person who believes in Jesus Christ, the living out of an ethical code in keeping with the message of the gospel. The Church authenticates the gift of faith given to a person and supports the believer in living out his/her life of faith. Faith in Jesus Christ is an experience of transcendence where a person is taken beyond his/her own limitations of creaturely existence and lives out the values of the Kingdom of God. The breaking of those idols which keep persons from encountering the living God is a continual challenge in living a true Christian life.

While the meaningfulness present in Jesus Christ cannot be exhausted, his being the eschatological prophet is well reflected in the gospel accounts of the New Testament. Jesus does not abolish institutional religion but he will not allow its rules and customs to stand in the way of making whole those who do not enjoy life to the full: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) The miracles by which persons are healed become signs of God's Kingdom in the world and a "summons to faith". The institutional is meant to preserve and protect the charismatic element in the Church, not to become its substitute.

The Church as a whole preserves the healthy tension that should exist in the believing community between the charismatic and the institutional.

Faith of the Early Church in Jesus Christ

The early Christians in different places formed church communities which articulated their faith in Jesus Christ in keeping with their ethnic, social and cultural traditions. When they proclaimed their faith in Jesus Christ to others the hearers responded by affirming their own new found faith in Jesus Christ through baptism. As a continuing presence of the saving action of God in Jesus Christ, the church community became a prophetic presence that represented both God's offer of salvation and humankind's response in faith. The faith stirred in the hearer would show itself in the adopting of a lifestyle where love of God would be authenticated by the love for one's neighbour. Baptism celebrated in and by the believing community would formally signify faith that was already present informally!

From God's point of view, Jesus is the concrete and transforming sign through which salvation is accessible to men and women in our world. He is not merely the divine as such who is manifested in the world but the divine as responding in a meaningful way to the different needs in the world. Different New Testament communities employed specific titles which were understandable to them to grasp the meaningfulness of the person of Jesus.

In the face of heterodoxy, classical Christology - as seen in the Chalcedon formula: truly God and truly man - stressed the divine and the human present in Jesus; contextual Christology, however, as elaborated in the New Testament texts, gives titles to Jesus in keeping with the meaningfulness of Jesus as perceived by different believing communities. Changed contexts in space and time necessitated new titles for Jesus in keeping with diverse worldviews, cultures, language and traditions. If one accepts that the world is evolving and new needs and contingencies are constantly arising, new modes of witnessing to Jesus Christ event will be necessary. The prophetic mission of the Church needs to look for expressions which could contribute to a healthy pluralism as seen in the New Testament community.

New expressions to carry out the prophetic mission of the Church must be looked for in the present-day Churches established in regions which in former times had been colonized. The proclamation of Jesus Christ as a unique manifestation of God's salvific activity in the world will always remain an intrinsic aspect of Christian proclamation. But how does one present the meaningfulness of Jesus Christ to a people whose religion lacks the categories that were present in the New Testament communities? In fact this has been a concern in the Indian Church but is often missed out in magisterial documents which seek to reaffirm the unique ontological status of Jesus Christ and the consequent exclusiveness that derives from it.

Believing in the Jesus Christ event means having faith in the person of Jesus. It means accepting the 'Other' as life-giving, as fulfilling; it accepts that one does not live for oneself but for the neighbour. Such acceptance is at the heart of community life. Having faith in Jesus implies acknowledging God's sovereignty over creation and recognizing in the person of Jesus God's definitive communication to humankind. The person who has faith in Jesus continues to do what Jesus did in his life among men and women so that they experience true unity in love and fellowship.

Jesus has been viewed as the eschatological prophet who authentically interprets human existence. He is not depicted in the New Testament as one who preaches a formal new religion. Instead he proclaims a new way of being truly religious by loving God and one's neighbour. To have faith in Jesus is to be guided by the proclamation that he made through his words and deeds and finally through his passion, death and resurrection. To do the Father's will was his ultimate desire. His followers who formed the early Church continued making the proclamation that Jesus inaugurated.

Ecclesial Implications of Faith in Jesus Christ Today

In times past, a common religion usually united a people. Even when people accepted a new religion and new belief systems took the place of the previous ones, there was no disruption as long as a common faith prevailed in a country. When the Protestant Reformation took place in the 16th century, a serious crisis arose for both Catholics and Protestants. The Peace of Westphalia (1648) which confirmed the

formula of Augsburg (1555) '*cuius regio eius religio*' but was condemned by Pope Innocent X (1644-55), offered a solution to the opposing Christian parties.

The emergence of the nation state in the 18th century began to pose a larger problem to the Church. Whereas in the past, Christianity would have been the binding force in a nation and Christian witnessing would take place in the midst of believers, now a state would be constituted by people sharing common interests - not necessarily Christian - and the Church would have to discover a new way of conceiving community and the function of religion in community. The nation state guaranteed freedom to all to follow the religion of their choice and it ensured fundamental rights for all men and women. Recognition of such religious freedom and rights had been prepared by the American War of Independence (1776) and the French Revolution (1789). In the 20th century, these found expression in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Following World War II, the world scenario underlined the need for envisaging international and national communities on a secular rather than religious basis.² Many of the colonized countries which had gained independence did not profess Christianity but other faiths. In sharp contrast to its previously stated position on the matter in former times, the Church in Vatican II put out the document *Dignitatis Humanae* which affirmed the fundamental right of a person to follow the religion of his/her choice. How could the Church witness meaningfully to the Jesus way of life among people of other faith persuasions but belonging to the same state/country?

Witnessing to Jesus Christ in Today's World

The implications of the Church's faith in Jesus Christ should be anchored in the teaching of Vatican Council II. A clearly stated purpose of the council was *aggiornamento*. The updating of the Church was seen as something that the ordinary administration of the Church was unable to carry out; hence the council. It is God's People as a whole that witnesses to faith in Jesus Christ and the original witnessing needs to be

². Here 'secular' is seen as contrary to positive, revealed religion; it does not mean 'atheistic' or 'anti-religious'.

reinterpreted if it seeks to fulfil the mission of Jesus himself in today's world.

Some authorities have stressed the 'hermeneutics of continuity' for interpreting Vatican II. It is also necessary to point out that a 'hermeneutics of discontinuity' must also be envisaged, else the whole purpose of renewal and updating would be defeated. Even though there is God's saving action taking place throughout human history, there is continuity and discontinuity between both, the First Testament and the Second. Some of the problems in today's Church seem to arise from an unquestioned esteem for the past (e.g., promoting Latin) and little regard to respond to changing needs in the Church and in the world.

a) *The Faith Experience as Constitutive of the Person*

Whatever be their religious affiliation, the experience of faith is already present in persons in the world. Values usually recognized as Christian can also be seen and experienced in communities outside the visible confines of the Church. Could this not be the reason for Tertullian (Apologetics 17, 6) to claim that an individual's soul is by nature 'Christian,' *anima naturaliter Christiana*? In other words, an ennobling and fulfilling way of living is meant to be professed by every person whatever be the religion he/she belongs to, and Christianity witnesses to the defining element of such living. But to define does not mean that it was absent before the defining moment. God's saving action was already at work in these persons and oriented towards the Christ experience. Further, while water baptism was the sacramental sign of God's saving presence in a person, the doctrine of the *votum* was also held in the Church from early times.

In today's world, awareness that God has already been present and working in persons of all faiths should be the starting point of the Church's proclamation. Such a starting point suggests a process of dialogue in which the Christian seeks to learn what God has done in another's life and how God's saving action has been positively shaping the life of the other. In the past, with the intention of strongly emphasizing the mission of the Church *ad gentes*, the position of the non-Christian party was described as lacking grace, i.e., God's saving action. The witnessing of the missionary was of one who went into uncharted territory

to save souls!

Today's Church has reason to feel more hopeful about the salvation of others and this is seen in the Vatican II documents *Lumen Gentium* 16 and *Gaudium et Spes* 22. The Church's approach to proclamation should be more in the nature of a dialogue partner rather than of an agent who presumes that the other is bereft of God experience. Even the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* that was written to encourage the traditional missionary mandate of the Church agrees that dialogue between Christians and others is a source of mutual enrichment. It would not have been so if the Christian did not benefit from the dialogue partner. Learning about different religions and their spiritualities should precede any effort to engage their members in a dialogue discourse. Seminary training has already included interreligious learning in its programme of studies.

**b) *To be Church today is to be in dialogue
with other faith communities***

If the Church is understood to be the sacrament of God's saving activity in the world, then it must be an agent that brings that saving activity to greater concreteness and visibility in the world. In addition, if there is one plan of salvation for all humankind, the Church should not be seen as one more "sectarian" religion making a pitch for Christianity but as a facilitator enabling people of different faith persuasions to correctly interpret God's saving presence wherever it is to be found.

The official documents concerning dialogue first speak of a dialogue of life. In the Asian/Indian context one finds that society is mostly a harmonious blend of people belonging to different religions. Should one hold that the existence of different religious communities must be seen as an accident of history but not as willed by God who has revealed one plan of salvation for all persons? If willed by God, persons of different faith persuasions could enrich each other by a sharing of lifestyles that build and consolidate unity and mutual caring.

A dialogue of action would take place when Christians and others together meet common challenges in day to day living. Not only are there common human needs but there are also common problems that

affect all persons and institutions. In fulfilling such needs and solving these problems a bonding takes place that builds community spirit and care for the other. The atmosphere that is built up through a dialogue of action provides the ground for listening and appreciating the religious beliefs and practices of the other. Often, it is fear that breeds insecurity and is responsible for writing off all other religions as of little consequence.

Today's Church must see its task of proclaiming faith in Jesus Christ by assuming the role of sharing which includes both giving and accepting. During the time of colonialism, the Church came to its mission *ad gentes* with the security of conquering armies. The outcome was a Church set up in mission lands that was transplanted from the land of the colonizing power. There was much giving by the missionary but little effort to accept what the other had to offer since it was assumed that the Church alone was the repository of saving grace. It took time to realize that such a proclamation could even be a counter-sign rather than a message of hope. More than ever, the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes* must inform the activity of the Church in the world for in this document of Vatican II, the world of the secular is not seen as inimical to God's purposes but the medium through which God's saving action in Jesus Christ shines forth.

c) *The Adulthood of Christian living*

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) who first spoke of a Christianity that had come of age. In the Catholic Church so much is made of the ordained ministry that even though there are trained and skilled laypersons who are deeply committed to the Church, it is the priest who exercises control over matters concerning the parishes. In general, the laity is made to believe that all moral issues have been prejudged by the hierarchical church and hence obedience alone is called for on their part. Training for the lay person to think for oneself and take responsibility for his/her actions is not encouraged. The official church operates more with *diktats* rather than helping persons to discover norms that can be applied. Such an understanding was in consonance with the adage *Roma locuta est, causa finita est* but this adage has had its day. Occasionally, mention is made of the *sensus fidei* - an instinctive understanding of what belong to orthodox faith in the life of the Church - but in practice it boils down to what the teaching church believes it

knows. There is something rather totalitarian in clamping down on the body of the faithful and telling them what they may or may not discuss, e.g. priesthood of women, priestly celibacy, etc. Such attitudes on the part of the authorities do not manifest a Church that fosters freedom of thought and expression, and that continues the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

d) *Using Civic space to build human community*

When today's secular society makes space for all religions it does not accord Christianity and the Church any unique status. If the church has to make a contribution to society's well-being, it will not be because of patronage by governments or state officials. It will happen because the Church takes its place as one among many who have the good of society at heart. It needs to convince others about the worth of a position it supports. For those who belong to the Church its magisterial office is seen as the guidance that the Spirit offers so that the truth is known. If Christianity has come of age, there must be opportunity for the individual Catholic to discern and decide by himself within the tradition of the Church. If the Church's point of view is to be of significance to the society then one must be willing to enter into the civic sphere where citizens of different religions can be heard and spoken to. In the context of civic space, different voices will be heard and contrary opinions expressed. Yet when the need arises, Church will raise its prophetic voice to challenge assumptions and claims that discount the teachings of Jesus Christ.

e) *Working for the Poor and the Marginalized*

Pope Francis has let it be known that the Church should be poor and for the poor. As he carries out the Petrine Ministry - supporting his brother bishops in caring for the People of God - the Pope has given sufficient indication that Christian spirituality should lead the Church to interact and serve people wherever they live and work, especially those who are poor or the marginalized. He has also shown his openness to dialogue with other faiths and to engage in a conversation with religions to build bridges with all peoples. The fact that he has already chosen a team of eight cardinals to advise him in matters of governance bodes well for the future. Such leadership will surely call for changes in the way the papacy has been exercised in the past.

Conclusion

From its beginnings in Palestine, the Christians' profession of faith in Jesus Christ has grown both in the ways it expresses itself and in the way that the Church understands itself. Palestinian Christianity grew beyond the Jewish periphery and the Church's self-understanding was of a community serving peoples who did not belong to the Jewish dispensation. In our times, a new awareness within the Church has seen it look towards other religions with reverence and respect. At the same time, the world of the secular is also seen as the locus where God's saving activity is at work. The community of Christian believers should therefore feel emboldened to join people of other religions in their life of faith to the God of all, and to peoples who make up the family of humankind.

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Faith in Jesus and Its Implication for the Liberation of Women

Patricia Santos

True faith involves conversion of heart, interior transformation and inner renewal which leads to fullness of life and fulfillment of being. Faith has to be integrated with life so as to be vibrant, meaningful and life-giving. Jesus' primary mission was to enable all persons to live fully in freedom led by the Spirit. He was concerned about restoring life to those who had been robbed of it. Our faith in Jesus must propel us to promote life in all its forms. Although women have been excluded and oppressed in the name of Jesus and religion, they find meaning, strength and comfort in identifying with Jesus the Christ. Jesus manifests God's all-inclusive love and goodness to all persons especially women, the weak and the poor. Jesus' relationship with his Abba was one of intimacy and freedom. He was comfortable in using both male and female metaphors and images to convey God's magnanimity and compassion. He welcomed all to sit at his table as well as share in his ministry. Faith in him involves the same attitude, behaviour and life-style from all disciples. It is only through communities of support and resistance that one can subvert the structures and institutions that are responsible for the oppression and dehumanization of the poor and marginalized. We need new models of church where there is greater participation, representation and voice for women. Some speak of a community of discipleship of equals based on Jesus' vision of the church or an inclusive church that favors reciprocity. Many propose a

‘participatory-inclusive model’ characterized by mutuality and solidarity where both men and women can share in the decision making process as well as in the privileges and resources of the community. Faith in Jesus without commitment to liberation especially of the poor and marginalized is hollow and meaningless. Faith in Jesus and commitment to what he stood for are the two sides of the same coin.

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Introduction

Faith is a personal knowledge of God with emphasis on the personal and experiential aspect as against the cognitive or propositional aspect.¹ We will never fully know God with our minds. As the fourteenth century anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* said: “Though we cannot know him we can love him. By love he may be touched and embraced, never by thought.” Faith then involves an encounter with God orienting us toward God. It consists in the ability to surrender oneself totally to the God of love and it expresses itself in belief, confession and contemplation. It is not easy but God draws us to God self; all we have to do is to surrender ourselves to God and experience the joy of lasting union. God’s gratuitous love transforms us, renews us and makes us whole thus restoring humanity to the covenantal relationship established right at the beginning of time. Openness to the divine in us is faith and to have a real experience of God we have to go beyond our established religions and ritualism. We need to go beyond the narrow images of God that we have created because of our own self distortions and faulty patterns of development and image the true God of love, of communion and of relationship. True faith involves conversion of heart, interior transformation and inner renewal which leads to fullness of life and

¹ Richard P McBrien, *Catholicism: Study Edition*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981), 24-25

fulfillment of being. There's much that can be said on faith but I wish to focus more on how faith in Jesus can and must advance the liberation of women.

What does Faith in Jesus signify?

The core religious experience in the Christian tradition is God's self-disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ. We are justified not through personal merit but by the free gift of God's grace through Jesus Christ. Bede Griffiths holds that in Jesus we can see the point in the evolution of the universe, when divine consciousness took possession of a human soul and body to reveal God's plan of salvation from the beginning. Thus in the Christ-event the ultimate meaning of human existence is revealed concretely, definitively and totally. For Rahner every act of faith is ultimately ordered to the mystery of Christ. Jesus, however, does not exhaust the mystery of God who continues to reveal God-self in diverse ways. Faith then is our response to God's continuous and constant revelation or self-communication in the world. While faith in Jesus is an encounter, it is not static; it can be a spontaneous immediate response leading to transformation and commitment or a gradual process of growth from no faith to partial faith to a deepening of faith in Jesus.

Faith in Jesus is a gift and a grace enabling us to make a sincere confession that Jesus Christ is truly Lord. We see this in Peter's confession in Mt 16:18 "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." This is also evident in the confession of Martha in Jn 11:27: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God; the one coming into the world." While Peter's confession appears to be a spontaneous instinctive response, Martha's confession expresses a personal conviction and testimony of her faith. Both Peter and Martha shared Jesus' life in an intimate way and had faith in Jesus. For us today, faith in Jesus is an experience of the person of Jesus as revealed to us through the Scriptures leading to a personal relationship with him. This personal encounter motivates one to make a personal commitment to Jesus not just in words but in action and through the witness of one's life. Faith rooted in justice makes present the reign of God which is life-giving, inclusive, communitarian and transcends all boundaries. It thus leads to liberation and transformation at all levels restoring us to wholeness and communion.

Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, states that liberation “cannot be limited purely and simply to the economic, social and cultural spheres but must concern the whole person in all dimensions including the relationship to an ‘absolute’ or even to the *Absolute* which is God.” Faith in Jesus is thus walking the way of Jesus; living fully, loving magnanimously, serving without counting the cost and bringing liberation to all especially those on the margins.

Faith in Jesus as Life-giving

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (Jn 10:10)

Faith has to be integrated with life so as to be vibrant, meaningful and life-giving. Jesus’ primary mission was to enable all persons to live fully in freedom led by the Spirit. He was concerned about restoring life to those who had been robbed of it. Our faith in Jesus must propel us to promote life in all its forms. Although women have been excluded and oppressed in the name of Jesus and religion, they find meaning, strength and comfort in identifying with Jesus the Christ. The entire life (incarnation and ministry), death and resurrection of Jesus provide an empowering way of life for women and marginalized groups. It is their faith that continues to sustain and strengthen millions of women and men who are marginalized, victimized and oppressed in many and different ways. In the midst of their pain and suffering they can continue to cry out to Jesus in faith and confidence, despite their supplications and pleas not being heeded to in the way they would have preferred.

Life is not a static reality but an ever-changing journey where we have moments of ecstasy and joy as well as moments of pain and frustration. We reach the pinnacles of glory and fulfillment; yet are sometimes thrown into the pits of doom and despair. Life is thus a constant process of dying and rising. Dying and rising were an important theme of Paul’s teaching. The cross illumined by the resurrection is at the heart of his theology. *If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord: so then, whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord. For to this end Christ died and lived again that he may be Lord both of the living and the dead* (Rom 14:8-9). For Paul death makes no difference to the Christian and there should be no fear for the one who believes in Jesus Christ for all will rise again with the glory of

the Risen Lord. It is God's Spirit that fills us with hope for the living and the dead. Almitra the seer asked the Prophet about death. And he said:

*You would know the secret of death.
But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?
The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day
cannot unveil the mystery of light.
If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your
heart wide unto the body of life.
For, life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.
In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent
knowledge of the beyond;
And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams
of spring.
Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.²*

The riddle of human existence finds its hope and meaning in the death and resurrection of Christ. But what is needed is faith and courage to make a radical shift from powerlessness and helplessness to empowerment and strength. We are called to live each day to the full and be life giving persons in our communities.

Faith in Jesus transcends all boundaries

Virgilio Elizondo, in the encounter with the other, we "become a source of revelation to one another" enabling a new identity to emerge through an intriguing process of "both affirmation and purification, of pain and joy, of death and birth."³ Thus "no one person, culture or region has an exclusive monopoly on the value, meaning and destiny of human life."⁴ According to Virgilio Elizondo,

Borders will not disappear, differences will not fade away
but they need not divide and keep peoples apart.
Rather than being the fences of separation they can well
serve as the reference points...

² Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (Ware, Heartfordshire: Wordswortheditions), p.50

³ Ibid., 29

⁴ Ibid., 29-30

Rather than seeing them as the ultimate dividing line between
 you and me, between us and them,
 we can see borders as the privileged meeting places where
 different persons and peoples
 will come together to form a new and more inclusive humanity.⁵

Often we get so caught in our exclusivist ghetto that we fail to recognize the uniqueness and beauty of our own identity as well as that of others. It is only through genuine openness and interaction with others that we can become fully human and relate to each other in mutuality. George Soares-Prabhu sees the Christian mission as extending beyond the boundaries of the Institutional Church. He stresses that "the cosmic, historical, and spiritual dimensions of the biblical story must enter into Christian mission so that its horizons are as large as the cosmos."⁶

Gal 3: 28 affirms the equality of all persons in Jesus irrespective of caste, status, gender. All the four gospels attest to women following Jesus and accompanying him in his ministry. Luke even refers to the women being present with Jesus right at the beginning of his ministry in Galilee. However, today women are excluded from active ministry and decision making in the Church. While the maleness of Christ is used by a patriarchal mindset to justify a sexist and androcentric response to the continuation of Jesus' ministry to the exclusion of women, feminist theologians attempt to reclaim the power and wisdom of the Christological message by retelling the story of Jesus and transforming the symbol of Christ. The main problem is not with regard to the maleness of Jesus; rather it lies with the undue emphasis given to this one particularity of sex. Thereby, "consciously or unconsciously, Jesus' maleness is lifted up and made essential for his christic function and identity, thus blocking women precisely because of their female sex from participating in the

⁵ Virgilio Elizondo, "Transformation of Borders - Border Separation or a New Identity?" in *Negotiating Borders: Theological Explorations in the Global Era. (Essays in Honour of Prof. Felix Wilfred)*, eds. Patrick Gnanapragasam and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New Delhi, India: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 28.

⁶ George Soares-Prabhu and Francis X. D'Sa, *The Dharma of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 256

fullness of their Christian identity as images of Christ.”⁷ Despite a sexist Christology that has created polarities and master-slave relationships, generations of women have witnessed to a deep faith in Jesus as they struggled against dehumanizing systems around the globe.

Jesus manifests God’s all-inclusive love and goodness to all persons especially women, the weak and the poor. Jesus’ relationship with his Abba was one of intimacy and freedom. He was comfortable in using both male and female metaphors and images to convey God’s magnanimity and compassion. He welcomed all to sit at his table as well as share in his ministry, rich and poor, sinner and saint, woman and man. Women and the poor in His presence felt energized, empowered and enthused to proclaim the good news and share in his mission. This mutual inclusive stand of Jesus with the poor, the marginalized and women lead to his crucifixion, an act of violence brought about by the political and religious status quo who felt threatened and powerless in his presence. It is the women who were filled with faith in Jesus that truly understood the mission of Jesus, believed in him and remained faithful to the very end. It is to these women that the good news of the resurrection was first broken so as to be shared with all the rest. We hear this so powerfully intoned at the Easter Sequel after the Gospel “Tell us Mary, what you saw on the way?” to which she responds “I saw the tomb of the living Christ and the glory of his rising; angelic witness, the towel and the linen cloths. Christ my hope is risen; he goes before his own into Galilee. Mary Magdalene now speaks throughout the whole world wherever Easter is celebrated in the Catholic liturgy.”⁸ As faithful witnesses of the resurrection, women continued Jesus’ mission being even present at the upper room during the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

What matters is not the maleness of Jesus as a defining prerogative for inclusive ministry; rather the continuation of Jesus’ mission and option for the poor, the marginalized and women. Jesus by challenging the unjust

⁷ Pauline Chakkalakal, *Discipleship a Space for Women’s Leadership? A Feminist Theological Critique*, (Mumbai: The Pauline Sisters Bombay Society, 2004), 119

⁸ Elizabeth Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” in Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed. *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 126

structures of domination and oppression reveals that another way is possible for those who dare and care. The Resurrection breaks down dualistic tendencies of matter and spirit, male and female, body and mind heralding the glorification of the body in the power of wisdom's spirit. Thus true faith in Jesus while undermining patriarchal thought and practice advocates right relationships between all persons irrespective of sex, class, caste or religion; encourages just and right behavior with the poor, the marginalized and people of all faiths; and promotes respect and care for the earth.

Faith in Jesus builds and supports Inclusive Communities

Faith in Jesus needs to be shared and celebrated in community. It is only through communities of support and resistance that one can subvert the structures and institutions that are responsible for the oppression and dehumanization of the poor and marginalized. We need new models of church where there is greater participation, representation and voice for women. Some speak of a community of discipleship of equals based on Jesus' vision of the church or an inclusive church that favors reciprocity. Many propose a 'participatory-inclusive model' characterized by mutuality and solidarity where both men and women can share in the decision making process as well as in the privileges and resources of the community. Solidarity with humankind results in a responsibility for the well-being of the other, especially the poor and powerless.⁹ Acknowledging the sacredness of the human person as the "locus of our encounter with God," thus goes hand in hand with a responsibility for their rights and welfare.¹⁰ Sr. Pauline Chakkalakal believes that the church as a community of the 'people of God' is entrusted with carrying out the mission of Jesus and this is possible only if church leaders create participatory structures to promote a "culture of shared responsibility".¹¹ The very structures of the Church need to be freed from clerical domination and monopoly as well as from sexism, classism, racism and all forms of violence. The silent and silenced half of the Church need to

⁹ George Soares-Prabhu, "The Bible as Magna Carta of Movements for Liberation and Human Rights." *Concilium* (1995/1): 93.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Chakkalakal, *Discipleship*, 303

assume its rightful position and role in the mission of the church. Grassroots communities need to be encouraged with good networking at all levels.

For Soares-Prabhu, the vision of a new society is encapsulated in the *Dharma of Jesus*, which spells “religious insight and ethical concern;” this *dharma* is a comprehensive pedagogy that “opposes all social, economic, political or religious structures” that hinder the “building of a genuinely fraternal community.”¹² The core message of Jesus “contains an *indicative*, which epitomizes all Christian theology, and an *imperative* which sums up all Christian ethics.”¹³ The indicative is to proclaim the good news of God’s unconditional love and the imperative is a call to repentance so as to restore relationships of love and trust. What is needed is a total renewal of our lives and a transformation of unjust structures so as to foster liberating and harmonious communities of women and men characterized by mutuality and equality in the church and in society. In keeping with the vision of Jesus Christian communities are called to be communities of *radical freedom, radical universalism, radical sharing, radical service and radical equality*.¹⁴

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

The encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John (Jn 4: 1-15) well illustrates the liberating elements of faith in Jesus leading to clarity of perception both for Jesus and the woman. It is Jesus who first takes the initiative to approach the woman breaking down the barriers concerning gender, culture, religion and status. As Jean Vanier rightly puts it; “Jesus meets and welcomes a fragile, broken

¹² Soares-Prabhu and Francis X. D’Sa, *The Dharma of Jesus*, 190. The Sermon on the Mount, understood as the Dharma of Jesus, was accepted by Gandhi and people of other faiths as the ‘essence of Christianity.’ It is also evident that inclusive language was not used at the time of Soares Prabhu’s writing though he regarded women favorably and tried to promote their cause. “In a patriarchal society where women were numbered with children and slaves as ‘minors’ with diminished responsibility and a restricted role in worship and in public life, Jesus admits them into his movement as helpers and disciples.” See p.91.

¹³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴ Ibid. For an explanation on each of these aspects see pp 107 -111.

woman. He knows the depth of her negative self-image. He does not judge or condemn her. He does not condescend or give her any moral lessons. He approaches her like a tired, thirsty beggar, asking her to do something for him.”¹⁵ In the process Jesus reveals to her who she is and who she will become.

According to Francis Moloney, the journey that Jesus embarks upon from Judea to Samaria to Galilee is for a divine purpose, mandating the necessity of moving his mission beyond Israel.¹⁶ The narrative of the Samaritan woman is situated between the first miracle at Cana (Jn 2:1-12) where Jesus revealed himself to the Jews and the second miracle at Cana (Jn 4:43-54), where a royal official from Capernaum comes to him for a miraculous cure. Jesus is said to be fleeing from Judea because of the hostility he anticipates from the Pharisees. Prior to his encounter with the Samaritan woman and other Samaritans, the Jewish characters exhibited differing reactions to the word of Jesus – that of no faith (as seen in the response of the Jews) or limited faith (seen in Nicodemus’ response) or authentic belief (that of John the Baptist).¹⁷ In the episode of the wedding at Cana we have Mary of Nazareth as the symbol of true faith in Jesus.

Moloney notes two moments of encounter with the Samaritan woman. In the first moment (vv. 7-9), it is Jesus who takes the initiative to enter into conversation with the woman by beginning with a simple request for water. He then “dominates the discussion and shifts it from ordinary water” to God’s gift of living water.¹⁸ Her initial response of sarcasm and disbelief is similar to that of the Jews. It is evident that Jesus and the woman are relating at different levels and seem to be “at cross purposes over thirst, wells, the gift of water, and life.”¹⁹ Her immediate concern is her physical and material well-being but Jesus by

¹⁵ Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 92

¹⁶ Francis J. Moloney and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 115

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 115

gradually revealing himself to her seeks to take her to a depth level of an encounter with God. Not only is the woman “unable to reach beyond the physical understanding of ‘living water’ but she is locked within her own traditions.”²⁰ Jesus thus attempts to bring about a shift in her perspective and understanding by using a universal truth concerning drinking water, which though quenches one’s immediate thirst will make one thirsty again. Through this universal truth, Jesus invites her to move beyond the narrow boundaries of her world to accept the life-giving water that he alone can give.

The second moment of the encounter with Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:16-26) focuses on the issue of identity and relationship in the context of worship. Jesus’ probe into the Samaritan woman’s marital life (v.16) is a way to reveal his identity as well as manifest his power to unearth the hidden facts of her life.²¹ From her initial acknowledgement of him as a prophet, Jesus seeks to reveal to her the living presence of God by using for the first time the ‘I Am’ claim (v.26), which then occurs several times in the Gospel of John.

We also observe a gradual swing in the woman’s response in the course of their conversation from an initial sarcastic retort ‘you a Jew’ (v.9) to a growing respect ‘Sir’ (v.19), from a preoccupation with the physical and material reality of her existence to a desire for a spiritual life of depth and meaning. In the process of the encounter, the woman receives new insight and experiences a new identity, role and mission. At the same time there is evidence of growth in her faith, which is not a passive acceptance of Jesus’ words but an ongoing seeking, questioning, resisting and discerning. The woman who is nameless is recognized and she dares to break the barriers of Jewish prohibitions and exhibit great courage in questioning a foreigner. Her conviction of Jesus as prophet encourages her to raise a religious issue not just for herself but for the entire community. Jesus too in the process is touched by the woman’s faith and courage. He not only helps the Samaritan woman to experience the fullness of life; he leads her to transcend the traditional beliefs,

²⁰ Ibid., 118

²¹ Moloney and Harrington, *The Gospel of John*, 127

symbols, institutions and structures of her time so as to be a true witness of communion and harmony.

The woman recognizes the greatness of Jesus and acknowledges him as Messiah and Lord. She then hastens to share her story with the townsmen and women whom she invites to 'come and see'; an expression used earlier by Jesus himself when the two disciples who follow him ask him where he lives. (Jn 1:39) The Gospel writer thus has a purpose in using this expression, which seems to indicate the necessity of personal experience for faith, conversion as well as for discipleship. While the Jews in the first narrative at Cana disappear, the Samaritan woman remains in the narrative as an important witness. The one who is touched, healed and transformed becomes a powerful evangelizer, communicating this new life to others. Her personal testimony and zeal draws the community to seek and experience the life-giver. The evangelist's construction of the narrative is not primarily to report chronological events but for a theological purpose to use interwoven themes in driving home a social, cultural and religious message.²² The Gospel of John thus unfolds diverse journeys of faith in order to manifest the faith needed to make a free and total personal commitment to the Lord leading to radical discipleship. No matter who we are, each of us is called to be a seeker, an evangelizer, a missionary and a liberator for our time, in our space and according to our culture.

Conclusion

Faith in Jesus is thus active, life giving and all embracing. It enables us to respect all persons and to challenge any structures or systems of society that divide and dehumanize so as to strive to build a just and more humane world. Faith in Jesus goes hand in hand with indignation against oppressive and unjust structures especially when they demean

²² Raymond Edward Brown and Francis J. Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New York: Doubleday, 2003). Brown sees replacement and response as recurring themes in the 'Book of Signs' (John 1:19 -12:50). Jesus is shown as replacing the Jewish institutions, religious views, and types, places and symbols of worship; thus evoking varied responses and reactions from the religious leaders, disciples and other people. Through all these signs, Jesus reveals himself to the people as the presence of God.

and denigrate the poor, the oppressed and in particular women. Social, religious and cultural values, traditions and practices need to be radically transformed if women are to experience liberation at all levels.

Faith in Jesus is also a personal testimony to be shared and proclaimed to all so that others may believe. Nicola's personal confession of faith proclaims liberation to women as well as invites us to be heralds of hope and good news in our broken and troubled world.

We believe in God,

Maker, Redeemer and Sustainer of Life, without beginning or end,
whose life-giving love was let loose on the first Easter Sunday
and whose life-giving love we share and proclaim here today.

We believe in God,

who gave up the divine life and submitted to the darkness
and terror of the grave;
and who enters with us unto every darkness
and terror we shall ever face.

We believe in God,

who raised Christ from the death of the grave to glorious new life;
and who raises our lives from sin and despair to newness
and hope again.

We believe in God,

who met the grief-stricken Mary in the garden
and called her into hope by the uttering of her name;
and who meets us in our grief and gives us courage to hope again
by tenderly calling our name.

We believe in God,

who sent Mary out from the garden
to be the witness and apostle of the resurrection;
and who commissions us, like Mary,
to be bearers of hope and good news in our world.

We believe in God,

Maker, Redeemer and Sustainer of Life, without beginning or end,
whose life-giving love was let loose on the first Easter Sunday
and whose life-giving love we share and proclaim today
to all women and men, wherever and whoever they are,
loved, blessed and called by God without beginning or end.²³

As women and men of deep faith in Jesus may we be life-givers,
transcending all barriers of class, caste, gender, religion, culture and status
so as to create inclusive communities of love, equality, freedom and
harmony.

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²³ Nicola Slee, "A Confession of Faith" in Hannah Ward, Jennifer Wild and Janet Morley, eds. *Celebrating Women: The New Edition*, (UK: SPCK, 1995), 139.

Inter-religious Dialogue vis-à-vis Faith in Jesus Christ

Ishanand Vempeny

The first part of this article describes the Church's teachings on inter-religious dialogue. In the second section of this part the author presents the reasons for these teachings and the emphasis on the love-centredness of dialogue. The author also presents some Biblical texts which are dialogue-friendly when read in the context of religious pluralism and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. The second part of this article attempts to present the saving message of Christ in the context of the world religions. Here we shall present the core of the Christian message in terms of the Kingdom of God (KG) ideally interpreted as World Family (WF) ideal, an ideal central to Hinduism and less obviously to the main stream religions in India. In the third part some points will be made about the praxis of dialogue in the context of the Christian faith-commitment. Before Vatican II the approach of Western theology had been, by and large, non-contextual. This theology, to a great extent, approached other religions as objects without getting into the experiential and committed dimensions of other religions. The Post-Vat. II official Church documents and the authoritative statements of national and international theological conferences and seminars on inter-religious dialogue are encouraging, enlightening and forward-looking. The basis of Christian faith is the experience of God as love (1 Jn. 4: 8 and 16), as unconditionally loving Father (Lk. 15), and all humans as brothers and sisters (Mt. 23:8 and 9). We called this experience of various degrees of intensity and depth *Abba Experience* and we affirmed that it is the basis of the KG ideal. This is the reason why

the Church insists that our approach to the Non-Christians should be with respect, openness and love.

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Introduction

At the beginning of a course in Missiology I placed the following issues before the students of Theology: “Even in secular discourse, ‘with the missionary zeal’, ‘with a sense of mission’, ‘taking risks like a missionary’ etc., have become common phrases to express a person’s single-minded and wholehearted dedication for a cause. With the awareness that the non-Christians can be saved in their own religions and with the knowledge of the Church’s imperatives for inter-religious dialogue, can a missionary today be as zealous, dedicated and focused as St. Paul, St. Francis Xavier or a Matteo Ricci to preach Christ and His Kingdom Ideal, to the non-Christians?” As far as I am concerned the responses of most of the students were somewhat satisfactory.

One said: “I do not believe in a Dante’s hell where a virtuous Socrates and a righteous Seneca had to be thrown into, albeit into relatively less painful and tormenting flames, for the only reason that they were not baptized. But I am outraged at the sight of the coexistence of dehumanizing poverty and misery in India and elsewhere, side by side with shameless and heartless luxury and consumerism. For instance, have a look at the multibillion rupees (eight thousand crores) mansion, near Malabar Hill, Mumbai, built by Mukesh Ambani for private use. According to a report, from the terrace of its 27th floor one can see some of the huge slums of Mumbai. I consider it my bounden duty to fight against this type of anti-Christian injustice and economic inequality”.

Another student responded saying: “I consider the God preached by Jesus Christ is a God of love and compassion as seen in the parable

of the Prodigal Son and that of the Good Shepherd who goes after the lost Sheep. But for many Christians religious practices are meant to escape from the eyes of a revengeful, angry and cruel God. This is even more obvious among many non-Christians who spend a lot of time and money in rituals to placate, angry, vindictive and cruel gods and goddesses. But a God of love cannot be preached meaningfully without loving the one we preach to. The message of a God of love will become exceptionally effective if it is done in loving dialogue with the non-Christians themselves”.

The response of another student was more or less in these terms though he made special reference to Christ’s Kingdom of God ideal. He said: “I will preach as Christ preached the Kingdom of God ideal in a world where there are so many anti-Kingdom structures like caste system, socially approved anti-feminine attitudes and the economic policies of the private as well as public institutions which caters primarily to the rich and the influential. I would like to spread the message of fellowship and justice of the Kingdom in collaboration with the non-Christian religions which too have similar institutional frame-works”.

I shall limit myself with these responses overlooking some other important ones like the intense desire of some to get involved in fighting the rampant corruption in India and the plan of another student to work with groups, both Christian and non-Christian, for inter-religious harmony and cooperation. These responses directly or indirectly can lead us to the heart of the topic of this article, namely, responding, on the one hand, to the Church’s imperatives for inter-religious dialogue and on the other hand, remaining committed to Jesus and His cause without unhealthy compromises. By and large, most of the students were opposed to any sort of one-sided preaching. The implied idea of this one-sided preaching is that “I know more than you” and “I am better than you”. In normal adult discourse such ideas are very odious. The Christian Preachers should also become listeners to the non-Christian message in the spirit of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

Our Procedure

The issues placed before the students and their responses can help us to begin this article in the right context. On the one hand we have the

dialogue imperatives starting from Vat. II and on the other, the imperatives of Christian faith to preach the Gospel all over the world in response to Christ's final commission. In the first part of this article we shall describe the Church's teachings on inter-religious dialogue. In the second section of this part we shall briefly sketch the reasons behind these teachings and the emphasis on the love-centredness of dialogue. We shall also consider some Biblical texts which are dialogue-friendly when read in the context of religious pluralism and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

Our concern in the second part is to look at the saving message of Christ in the context of the world religions. Here we shall present the core of the Christian message in terms of the Kingdom of God (KG) ideal interpreted as World Family (WF) ideal, an ideal central to Hinduism and less obviously to the main stream religions in India. In the third part some points will be made about the praxis of dialogue.

I. Dialogue Approach to Other Religions

In a situation of religious pluralism as in India, inter-religious dialogue is of paramount importance. With our unenviable past of communal squabbles, rivalry and riots, it is natural for us to wish for cooperation among the various religions. Indeed, in today's world the problem should not be between this religion and that religion, but between religion and irreligion, between *dharma* and *adharma*. If religions exhaust all their energies in inter-religious rivalry, the anti-religious forces may do immense harm to the fundamental human values which all the religions wish to protect. Besides, no religion is an adequate response to the basic religious drives in man but rather to their partial fulfillment, and so inter-religious dialogue can enrich and complement each religion in man's perennial quest for the Absolute Truth, Absolute Love and Absolute Bliss.

1. Dialogue Approach

Before Vatican II the approach of Western theology had been, by and large, non-contextual. This theology, to a great extent, approached other religions as objects without getting into the experiential and commitment dimensions of other religions. These aspects of religion can be illustrated through an example. A collegian said in an inter-religious

meeting: "My mother may be ill-mannered and ugly, but no other person can be her adequate substitute. Islam is my mother." How shall we interpret such a standpoint? The collegian admits that his mother, in the eyes of an "impartial" observer, may be ill-mannered and ugly. He might have come to know this by comparing his mother with other women. But his filial commitment establishes an irreplaceable relation between him and her, and his filial love makes him see her imperfections in a very different light from the one in which an impartial observer would see them. He therefore wants others to know that unless they understand and experience, from his own point of view, his loyalty to Islam, they would not be able to appreciate what his religion means to him.

The Post-Vat. II official Church documents and the authoritative statements of national and international theological conferences and seminars on inter-religious dialogue are encouraging, enlightening and forward-looking. The Church had said, through the council of Florence, that "no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life" (ND. 1005). The same Church after a little more than five centuries could say through Vat. II: "And so the Church has this exhortation for her sons: prudently and lovingly through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness to the Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral good, as well as the socio-cultural values found among them" (NA 2, Cf. LG. 16). When we read these two documents we are reminded of the presence of the Spirit of God in the Church to interpret the revealed truths in a way relevant and challenging to the people of different epochs.

As in the immediate Post-Vatican period even today there are voices in the Church against inter-religious dialogue. Even the Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, *Dominus Jesus* is not very dialogue-friendly. In fact *Jeevadhara* itself devoted a whole issue with a number of articles by international theologians opposing this anti-dialogal stance of this encyclical¹. Referring to the negative reaction to this document, the

¹ Cfr. Articles in *Jeevadhara*, vol.xxxi, no.183, May 2001. This whole issue of *Jeevadhara* consists of articles by internationally reputed theologians who point out its flaws and anti-Vat. II reactions.

spokesperson for FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference), Edmund Chia wrote six months after the publication of this document:

Even as six months have passed, more articles continue to be churned out and many regard the *Dominus Jesus* document a *pastoral disaster*. A look at some of the article-headings on the Yahoo sites is revealing. For instance, one article begins with *The Much-maligned Vatican Document...* and another had this for title: *Dominus Jesus Exalts Her Throne*. Yet another hit the nail right on the head by entitling it explicitly as: *Catholics are the Best: I know you mean it, but did you have to say it that way?* Others carried titles such as *Negative Reactions to Dominus Jesus, Vatican Declaration Provokes Churches. The Vatican Magnifies Divide Among World's Religions. Rome, Relativism and Reaction* and *A Kiss of Death for The Ecumenists*.²

But a recent official statement of Pope Benedict XVI on the NCRs has been very positive and it encourages all the Christians for inter-religious dialogue. The Pope when receiving in audience the members of *The Foundation for Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Research and Dialogue* said: "I repeat with insistence, research and inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue are not an option but a vital necessity for our time"³.

A. The Dialogue Imperatives by the Church⁴

No other Pope has so emphatically and unambiguously spoken about the necessity of inter-religious dialogue as John Paul II. This Pope has not only stressed its need but also has given directions as to how to practice it both by his teachings as well as by his example. The international inter-religious conference, organized under the guidance of the Pope, in 1986 in Assisi was indeed a high point.

² Cfr. Jeevadhara, *op.cit.*, p.229

³ Vatican City, Feb. 7, 2007, www.zenit.org

⁴ Cfr. Ishanand Vempeny, "Emerging India and the Word of God", *Non-Biblical Scriptures in Dialogal Theologizing*, Fr. Paul Puthanangady, (Edit.), Bangalore: NBCLC, 1991, pp.418420

Perhaps one of the most enlightening of his allocutions on this topic was the one addressed to the members of the different religions in Madras in February 1986. Here the Pope enumerates a number of reasons for dialogue and points out its way: "The Catholic Church recognizes the truths that are contained in the religious traditions of India. This recognition makes true dialogue possible... The Church's approach to other religions is one of genuine respect; with them she seeks mutual collaboration. This respect is twofold: respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man"⁵.

To the members of the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions, in 1984, the Pope said:

In fact, no one can fail to see the importance and the need which inter-religious dialogue assumes for all religions and all believers, called today more than ever to collaborate so that every person can reach his transcendent goal and realize his authentic growth and to help cultures preserve their own religious and spiritual values in the presence of rapid social changes. Dialogue is fundamental for the Church, which is called to collaborate in God's plan with its methods of presence, respect, and love towards all persons.⁶

The Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions (Rome) have promulgated in 1984 a document under the title: *The Attitude of the Church Towards The Followers of Other Religions*. It points out how the Christian mission by necessity has to be dialogal:

Dialogue is thus the norm and necessary means of every Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service or direct proclamation... Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogal spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teaching of the Gospel"⁷.

⁵ The Pope Speaks to India, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, no.17:2, p.83

⁶ The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of other Religions, "Address of the Pope at the Conclusion of the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat", Vatican: Secretarius Pro Non-Christianis, 1984, no.2, p.3

⁷ *op.cit.*, no.30, p.18

Three great events that took place in India after Vat. II gave great momentum to the cause of inter-religious dialogue. One of them was the International Seminar held in Bombay almost in the beginning of Vat. II and in connection with the Eucharistic Congress in 1964, which pointed out the salvific value of Non-Christian Religions. Then, the All India Seminar, held in Bangalore, in 1969, and the International Seminar in Nagpur in 1973, declare forcefully and effectively the need of inter-religious dialogue. To this we may add the impact of the Patna National Consultation in 1977 and the three conferences of Indian Theological Association held in 1987, 1988 and 1989 which triggered the cause of inter-religious dialogue in India.

B. Reasons for Dialogue according to these Documents

In his Chennai address to the Non-Christians Pope John Paul II said:

The Catholic Church recognizes the truths that are contained in the religious tradition of India. This recognition makes true dialogue possible. Here today the Church wishes to voice again her true appreciation of the great heritage of the religious spirit that is manifested in your cultural tradition. The Church's approach to other religions is one of genuine respect, and with them she seeks mutual collaboration⁸.

The International Seminar held at Nagpur gives a very profound reason for dialogue. After explaining how the Vat. II helps us to see the World Religions in a new light, the Seminar declares:

We see at work in them Christ and His Grace an ineffable mystery, the centre and ground of reality and human life, is in different forms and manners active among all peoples of the world and gives ultimate meaning to human existence and aspirations. This mystery which is called by different names, but which no name can adequately represent, is definitely disclosed and communicated in Jesus of Nazareth⁹.

The Indian Theological Association in its 1989 session gives a very interesting sociological reason for the dialogue imperative:

⁸ *op.cit.*, no.17:2, p.83

⁹ Service and Salvation, Joseph Pathrapankal (edit), Bangalore: TPI, 1973, nos.12 and 13, p.4

One insight, among many others, that contemporary thought on human nature has brought to light, is the radical insufficiency of any isolated human existence and its need for dialogue for its own self-understanding and authenticity. This principle is valid also in the realm of our religious existence. A religion, however exalted, can no more define itself in splendid isolation from other religions. Rather it has to evolve its own self-understanding in its manifold forms of relatedness to other religions. This takes us to the reality of dialogue in our life¹⁰.

Most of the reasons given in the above documents depend on Vatican II. The documents by the Secretariat referred to earlier give quite a few references to Vatican II in the following statement:

This vision induced the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to affirm that in the religious traditions of non-Christians there exist 'elements which are true and good' (OT 16); 'precious things, both religious and human' (GS 92); 'seeds of contemplation' (AG 18); 'elements of truth and grace' (AG 9); 'seeds of the word' (AG 11, 15) and 'rays of the truth which illumines all mankind' (NA 2). According to explicit conciliar indications, these values are found preserved in the great religious traditions of humanity. Therefore, they merit the attention and esteem of Christians, and their spiritual patrimony is a genuine invitation to dialogue (Cf NA 2, 3; AG 11) not only in those things which unite us but also in our difference¹¹.

C. Love-centredness Leading to Rootedness with Openness

Most of the official documents stress the need of love and respect for the partners in dialogue. Pope John Paul II, quoting *Ecclesiam Suam* of his predecessor Pope Paul VI, affirms that "Dialogue proceeds from the 'internal drive of charity'". The Vatican Secretariat too stresses the need of love when it says: "Each aspect and activity of the Church's mission must therefore be imbued with the spirit of love if it is to be faithful to Christ who commanded the mission and continues to make it possible throughout history"¹². The CBCI guidelines too emphasize the

¹⁰ Theology of Religions, Tiruchirapalli: St. Paul's Seminary, no.16, pp.18-19

¹¹ *op. cit.*, no.26, p.16

¹² *op.cit.*, no.9, p.9

need of love: "There must be a pervading atmosphere of a deep love of God and love of the other partners in the dialogue. Like all Christian activity, dialogue can be genuine and profitable only if it is the expression of love"¹³.

If this approach demands that one has to be committed to one's own religion as deeply and as honestly as possible, how can one enter into the heart of the religions of others with openness? The simple answer is that it is through the door of genuine love, the nature of which is sensed both by the child and the grown-up, the educated and the illiterate. And this doctrine is preached by all the religions in the name of *ahimsa*, *karuna*, *agape*, etc. As Erich Fromm says, "In love the paradox occurs that two beings become one yet remain two"¹⁴. According to this author one of the intrinsic elements of love is mutual respect which makes one look at the other as he is, and view things from his own stand-point. Knowing a person intimately and existentially is essentially connected with loving him¹⁵. About the connection between knowledge and love in a personalistic situation, Victor Frankl says: "Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him"¹⁶.

D. Re-reading the Bible for Dialogue-friendly Texts

When we re-read the Scriptures from the context of dialogue we will come across a number of themes and texts which are inclusive and dialogue-friendly. Even in the OT there are many texts which seemed to have been inspired by Dialogal Spirit. The Book of Jonah, the prophecies of Balaam and of Malachi are very inspiring for dialogue¹⁷. We shall later on make passing references to the Biblical texts which are exclusive or even fundamentalistic. In the NT, in spite of the bloody persecutions that were going on against the Christians both by the Jews and by the Romans during the coming-to-be of the Gospels, there are numerous

¹³ *op.cit.*, no.44, p.46

¹⁴ *The Art of Loving*, New York : Bantam Book, 1970, p.17

¹⁵ *op.cit.*, p.22

¹⁶ *Man's Search for Meaning*, New York: Washington Square Press, 1968, p.176

¹⁷ Cfr. Ishanand, *Inspiration in Non-Biblical Scriptures*, Bangalore: TPI, 1973, pp.126-133

texts which can guide us in our Dialogal ventures. We shall select just three texts: (1) The Wise Men from the East (Mt. 2:1-12), (2) The Cornelius Episode (AA 10: 1 to 11:18) and (3) Paul's Speech in Athens (AA. 17:23-31)¹⁸.

1. The Wise Men from the East (Mt. 2:1-12)

The word used in Greek is 'magus' which had various meanings among which one signifies a member of the Persian priestly caste and another, the possessor of occult knowledge and power. The occult knowledge was usually understood in terms of astrology. Since Babylonia was the traditional home for astrology, one could guess that these men had come from that region. Even a midrashic interpretation of this text does not rule out the probability of the incident narrated or the lesson we would like to learn.

Here come three Gentile Wise Men to Jerusalem, the heart of the nation of the Chosen People. They inquire about the birth of the Messiah about whom there were many prophesies and whom the Jewish people were expecting. At first the Jewish leaders looked not much bothered about the birth. But they began to look into the sacred books, perhaps chiefly due to the insistence of Herod, who had many things at stake in such an eventuality. The Jewish Religious Authorities agree with a possibility inquired about by the Wise Men. The news was no source of pleasure for Herod. The *Magi* go to Bethlehem guided by the same star and pay obeisance to the new born Messiah.

This story bears comparison with that of Jonah both with regard to the dramatic style and with regard to the content. Jonah, a Jewish prophet goes to a non-Jewish people at the bidding of Yahweh. In the whole story Jonah is the villain. Here, some Gentile Wise Men come to the Jewish capital and the reaction of the Jewish people was quite opposite to that of the Ninivites who repented of their sins. The Magi Story tells us that there is revelation among the gentiles. The revelation is understood of the religious symbols of the gentiles concerned, and the revealed truth as practiced by these men.

¹⁸ Cfr. For wiper deeper study, Ishanand, *Raw Materials for an Indian Theology*, Chapter-9, pp.292-318

2. The Cornelius Episode (AA 10:1 to 11:18)

Here three religions are involved: the religion of the Chosen People, the New Israel, and that of a gentile military leader. The revelation is in favour of the gentiles as in the case of Jonah, Balaam and Magi. The leader of the New Israel, Peter, at first refuses to eat the 'impure animals' as prescribed in Lv 11. But the heavenly message tells him not to call anything **impure** that has been made **pure** by God (Acts 10:15).

The big sheet being let down to earth by its four corners with all sorts of animals can very well recall the Ark of Noah (Gen 6). The Ark represented a 'chosen few' whereas the sheet represented the whole of humanity in which none is too **impure** not to be accepted. When the messengers of Cornelius came, Peter interpreted the whole revelation in favour of the gentiles and he went along with the messengers. The central message proclaimed here is interpreted by Peter in these words: "The truth I have now come to realize is that God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34; Cfr. also 1 Pet 1:17 and Rom 2:11). He had heard from his Master similar utterances: "But I say this to you; love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike" (Mt. 5:44-45).

If Origen and Cyprian had had the revelation of this Sheet let down from heaven, which is more representative of the Church than the Ark of Noah, we would not have had the exclusivistic axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (=Outside the Church there is no salvation).

3. Paul's Athenian Speech (AA. 17:23-31)

This speech is considered in comparison with his speech to the Jews in Pisidia in Antioch (Acts 13: 6-41) and to the Christians in Ephesus (Acts 20: 18:35), and with the three speeches of Peter viz. the one on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40), another in the temple (Acts 3:12-20) and yet another before Cornelius (Acts 10: 34-43). This speech of Paul is considered to be a failure by some on the basis of 1 Cor 2:2 where Paul looks down on human wisdom in comparison with the divine wisdom

and is often considered to be a model for how not to preach. But in truth this was no more of a failure than that of Jesus in Nazareth (Lk 4:16-22).

Following the rules of rhetoric he tries to enter through the door of the Athenians to bring them out through his door. He uses quotations not from the OT but from the sacred writings of the 'Greek Prophets', Aratos (ca 310 BC) and 'Epimenides', a pre-Socratic sage. He appreciates their religiosity. He then speaks approvingly and appreciatively of their religion taken collectively:

From one single stock he not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but he decreed how long each nation should flourish and what the boundaries of its territory should be. And he did this so that all nations might seek the deity and, by feeling their way towards him, succeed in finding him. Yet in fact he is not far from any of us, since it is in him that we live, and move, and exit, as indeed some of your own writers have said: 'We are his children' (17: 26-28).

The tone of this speech is as important as its content. There is no condemnation but approbation. Not a blind approval but a critical one. The Jerome Biblical Commentary points out that the whole speech of Paul had quite some resemblance to the initial stanzas of Arato's poem. Aratos too was a Silician like Paul.

II. The Meaning of Faith in Christ

Pope Benedict XVI has declared 2013 as **YEAR OF FAITH**. It is fitting that as a gesture of 'Thinking with the Church', we are dealing with a topic like this. Christ is indeed the centre of Christian Faith "*O Logos Sarx Egeneto*" (= The Word became Flesh). In the past Christian theology was centred on Christ. There has not been much change in teaching theology as something Christo-centric.

What do we understand by Faith in Christ? Is it enough to pick up the Christological articles from the Nicene Creed? In the Eucharistic celebration of the Latin Rite, after the consecration there is the declaration by the priest "The Mystery of Faith". One of the formulas through which the people respond to this declaration is the following: "Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again". To my mind, this formula does

not express many of the Christological dogmas. How then shall we express within our scope the essential elements of Faith in Christ?

One of the concepts which seems to express in a summary form, the sum total of Christ's teachings, indeed the very personality of Christ, is that of the Kingdom of God. As we shall soon point out, this concept contains both the words and deeds of Christ. Besides, as the Fathers of the Church taught by calling Christ "*Autobasilea*", Jesus Christ is the personified expression of the Kingdom ideal. Therefore, commitment to the Kingdom ideal is commitment to Christ Himself. Another reason for choosing the Kingdom ideal to express the gist of Christian Faith is that this ideal can lead to concepts and ideals in Non-Christian Religions homologically similar to it. Another important advantage of this central concept of the NT is that it does not teach that Salvation is a once-for-all, press-button reality. The Kingdom of God ideal is partly realized here on earth and fully in the beyond. It is in a process of growth here on earth like a mustard seed.

A. Articulating Faith in Christ through the Kingdom of God Ideal

No serious theologian or Biblical scholar seems to doubt the centrality of the KG Ideal in Christ's preaching. This concept and its equivalents, occur in the NT more than a hundred times (106 according to George Soares Prabhu, 122 times says J. Fullenbach, and about 150 times according to a number of modern scholars). The total will increase if we add the equivalent Johanine concept "new life" to the list. The following view of one of the greatest Indian Biblical Scholars, the late George Soares, seems to me beyond serious controversy:

But the preaching of Jesus was concerned primarily, one might even say exclusively, with the "Kingdom of God", for everything he said and did was ultimately related to this overriding and urgent concern. The Kingdom is the referent of most of his parables (see specially Mt. 13:1-52; 18:21-35; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Mk. 4:26-29); the subject of many of his aphoristic sayings (Mt. 7:21; 18:3; 17:19-12; Mk.9:1-9:47; 10:23-25; Lk.6:20; 9:62; 13:28-29; 16:16; 17:20-21). It is also the content of the symbolic actions which form so large a part of his ministry: his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners (Mk 2:15-17; Lk.15:12-2), and

his healings and exorcisms. For in his 'communion' with the religious and social outcasts of his people (tax collectors and sinners) Jesus demonstrates in action the presence of the Kingdom of God, that is of God's unconditional and wholly forgiving love for sinful mankind. He explicitly interprets his miracles as 'signs' that the Kingdom of God has come and has put an end to Satan's oppressive rule (Mk. 3:23-27; Mt 11:2-6; 12:25-28).¹⁹

I have written rather elaborately on this topic in a number of articles and books.²⁰ Here we are interested in a few salient points of this ideal with direct relevance to our topic. "*Abba-Experience*" seems to be the basis of the experience of this ideal.

B. The '*Abba-Experience*'

There seems to be a general agreement to the view that the KG Ideal is based on the *Abba-experience* of Jesus and the consequent *Abba-experience* of Christ's followers. *Abba* is an Aramaic word, with which little children addressed their fathers, and it is somewhat equivalent to the English word 'daddy'. This is a revolutionary way of addressing God in the Jewish situation. Knowing fully well the sacredness and delicacy of this way of addressing God, St. Mark and the later translators retained the Aramaic word, '*Abba*', in Christ's prayer in Gethsemane: "*Abba* Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will but what thou wilt" (Mk 14:36).

In the baptismal theophany the Father declares Jesus as His Son: "This is My Son, the Beloved my favour rests on him" (Mt. 3:17). In the first recorded words of Jesus we read, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?" (Lk. 3:49). He expresses His intimate-relationship with the Father: "Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son

¹⁹ Unpublished notes on *The Dharma of Jesus*, pp.4-5

²⁰ 1) *Games We Religious Play*, Delhi: Media House, 1997, pp.77-116; 2) *Raw Materials for an Indian Theology*, Volume-I, Delhi: Media House and ISPCK, 2008, pp.111-161; 3) *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*, General Editor D. P. Chattopadhyaya, Vol. VII, Part 6, *Indian Christianity*, New Delhi, 2009, edited by A. V. Afonso, "Christ's Central Message in Today's India, Chap. 21, pp.421-449

except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Mt. 11: 26-27). Later on He will express His relationship of intimacy with the Father in terms of identification, "The Father and I are one" (Jn. 10:30).

As branches to the vine (Jn. 15), as grafted branch to the trunk of a new tree (Rom. 6:5) and as members of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12 and 1 Cor.12), Christians believe that they share His life and they too can call God in His Spirit Abba Father. "When we cry, Abba Father it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." (Rom. 8:15-17; Cf. Gal.4:5 ff.) John, in his Gospel (Jn 1:12) and in his epistles (e.g. 1 Jn.3:1-2) keeps on insisting that we are truly God's children. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed out that we should consider God at least as loving and caring as a decent human father (Mt 7:7-11). In other words, the disciples of Christ too can have the *Abba-experience* similar to that of Christ.

In this *Abba-experience* I usually distinguish a father-element and a mother-element. The Power and Truth aspect of the *Abba*, I attribute to the father-element and the unconditional love of the *Abba* to the mother-element, albeit with the awareness that the former elements can be very strong in mothers and the latter aspect can be very strong in fathers. As in other human traits here too we cannot categorize them in watertight compartments. All the same this distinction is valuable as far as it goes. After all, in India God is addressed very much as father and mother (*tvameva mata pita ca tvameva*) as for example, in the daily prayer of the Hindus.

C. The Kingdom Ideal as a World Family Ideal

For us of the democratic age, Kings and Kingdoms do not have much appeal. To express the rootedness of this ideal in the Old Testament (OT) Kingdom of God tradition, this concept is important. But when we analyze its characteristics we realize that it is a universal ideal of the World Family (WF). From an Indian point of view such an interpretation is of great importance as we shall soon see. The surprising thing is that this is not a forced or contrived interpretation of the NT.

There are, however, a few misconceptions among the Non-Hindu Scholars, especially among the Western ones, about this concept. The misconceptions are based more on the context rather than on the content of the original Sanskrit text. First we shall cite this verse from *Hitopadesa* and then state some contextual questions.

Ayam nijah parovetti ganana laghuchetasam
Udara charitanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam

According to the above verse only small minds (*laghu-chetasam*) think of things as mine (*ayam*) and yours (*nija*), but generous or magnanimous persons (*udara charitanam*) think in terms of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* [*vasudha* = world + *iva* (= as though) + *kutumbakam* (=family like)]²¹.

In this part of *Hitopadesa* which deals with “*mitra-labha*”, one of the five diplomatic policies (*Panchatantra*) taught by a Guru for instructing some princes who are of poor intelligence. The Guru teaches them through stories. The characters of the stories are usually animals and birds. In the *Hitopadesa*, verses from the original *Panchatantra* are quoted by these characters. Under the title *mitra-labha* (gaining friends) in Part-I, there are eight stories (*kathas*). Our verse is taken from the 3rd story. These diplomatic principles are taught by various animals and birds among whom some are crooked and some are honest. The most crooked ‘Preacher’ in the first part, story no.3 is a cat. After cheating the birds about his evil intentions through pious principles and stories, he began to eat up the young ones of the birds. Another crooked preacher of part-I is a fox who wanted to get a deer killed for getting a share of its dead body. He too tells pious stories and declares wise principles to realize his evil intention. Our verse was articulated by the fox (part-I, story-3, verse-71) to hide his evil intention of getting the deer killed.²²

The Western scholars are usually aware of the devil quoting the Bible to tempt Jesus asking him to jump from the pinnacle of the temple

²¹ Cfr. *Hitopadesha*, Dr. Kansara Narayan M., Ahmedabad-1: Saraswati Pustak Bhandar, 1978, p.37

²² *Hitopadesa*, op.cit., p.37

(Mt. 4:6). The devil does it quoting Psalms 91: 10-11 making minor modifications to suit his interest.

*He has given his angels orders about you,
and they will carry you in their arms
in case you trip over a stone.*

Is it right to say that since this verse was used by the devil, it has lost its meaning? No Biblical scholar would accept such an interpretation. If this is so why should we consider that the above verse from *Hitopadesa* is not very meaningful to us today? I do not see any reason to consider the verse teaching the World Family Ideal is a polluted one because it was quoted by a fox with evil intention.

In fact, there is another equally well-known *sloka* (verse) in the Indian tradition which gives the same meaning as that of the above verse: *Atraiva vishvam bhavati ekanidam*. This verse is an aspiration for all the creatures in the world (*vishvam*) to be so united and cooperative as though they are the members of a single nest (*ekanidam*). This ideal was captured by the late Indo-American astronaut, Kalpana Chawla through her photographs of the earth from the space-shuttle Columbia, and by her motto: *samucha brahmand mera kutumb hai* (= The whole cosmos is my family). Just before taking off for her final mission on the Space Shuttle, in her last interview to Anil Padmanabhan, she quoted the Roman Philosopher Seneca, "I was born not for one corner; the whole world is my native land", and said: "I have felt that connection and stewardship ...not just for Earth, but the whole Universe."²³

This same ideal could be found in the South Indian vernaculars like Tamil: *Yatum urai yavarum kelir*, and Malayalam: *Lokame Taravad*. The deep-rootedness of this ideal in the Indian Ethos could be seen through the peculiar custom that exists all over India, in the North and in the South, namely the custom of addressing people with whom one has no blood-relationship or relations of affinity, as though they are one's blood relations. What pass in English as Mr., Mrs., Master, Miss etc., in the Indian languages become brother, sister, uncle, aunt, etc. The following common nouns from the Northern and Southern languages can be taken

²³ *India Today*, February 17, 2003, p.38

as examples: *Bhai* (=brother in Hindi, Gujarati, etc.), *Annan*, *Thambi*, *Akka* (elder brother, younger brother, elder sister in Tamil), *Chettan*, *Chechi*, (=elder brother, elder sister in Malayalam), *Kaka* (paternal uncle in Gujarati), *Chacha* (paternal uncle in Hindi), *Masi* (maternal aunt in Gujarati), *Buvaji* (paternal aunt in Hindi). The family, joint family, extended family in terms of teachers, guests, doctors and people of the same caste, village etc. appear to belong to one family through such appellations, though the living of this ideal in practice may be quite another thing as in the case of any other ideal in any religion.

D. Brief Comparison between the Kingdom of God Ideals and Family Ideals

The dialogue imperatives by the Church show how she opens herself to other religions but also how she reaches out to them. This is especially so when the Church teaches her children that dialogue has been an expression of genuine Christian love which is rooted in a God who is Love itself. On the other hand, Christian faith as understood in terms of the KG ideal and as interpreted as the WF ideal is equally open and inviting. Besides when we see the WF ideal directly or indirectly is embedded in the Non-Christian Scriptures like the *Bhagawad Gita*, *Holy Quran* and *Guru Granth Saheb*, we realize that these religions too are open to inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. Indeed, during the past few decades I have been taking part in dialogue activities organized by the non-Christians themselves. What we have stated just above by way of introduction to this ideal, with regard to its presence in Hinduism in particular and in the Hindu Ethos and in the Indic Religions in general, are sufficient enough for our purpose. I have done more elaborate studies on this topic elsewhere²⁴.

Some people wonder how valuable it is to compare the ideals of the KG with the WF. They point out that due to reasons like that of

²⁴ Cfr. Ishanand, *Raw Materials for an Indian Theology*, "Christ's Central Message Interpreted for Today's India", Delhi : Media House & ISPCK, 2008, pp.111-161 and also History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, General Editor D. P. Chattopadhyaya, Vol. VII, Part 6, *Indian Christianity*, New Delhi, 2009, edited by A. V. Afonso, "Christ's Central Message in Today's India, Chap. 21, pp.421-449

globalization, urbanization, the growth of nuclear families etc. there is almost a break-down of family values. But the truth seems to be is that when various forces are attacking the family values, in most of the families, especially of Afro-Asian countries, many of these values are kept up and cherished. Even in the families where these values are eroded, the family members begin to realize with concern that their family is not even a good one, much less an ideal one. One might even agree with the view that the percentage of good and model families is steadily and speedily decreasing. In spite of this, people by and large, know which is a good family and which is not a good one, and which is an ideal family and which is not.

Another important value of this WF ideal is that practically all human beings long for such an ideal. One of the main reasons for this is that naturally all human beings, notwithstanding some exceptions here and there, desire affiliation to a group, affection from others, recognition by others as somebody important, and conducive atmosphere for personal growth and achievements. Affiliation to genuine and ideal families helps one to achieve all these personal goals for personality fulfillment. In this section we shall compare some of the features or characteristic of the KG ideal with WF ideal.

1. The Boss of the Kingdom

The chief executive (boss) of the Kingdom is not a King or an Emperor. He is an 'Abba' which means Father or better 'Daddy Dear'. *Abba* is the name with which little children addressed their Fathers at the time of Jesus. The Semitic culture is Patriarchal and male-dominated. But we have briefly pointed out that this Father has also the motherly qualities of unconditional love, ever-forgiving attitude and concern for the 'least fortunate' of his children.

In Hinduism God is addressed in the daily prayer *tvameva mata pita ca tvameva, tvameva bandhu sakha ca tvameva* which means they addressed God as Father, Mother, Brother, Friend. In these addresses God is conceived as the source of love and power. In the Islamic addresses of God *Bismillahi r-rahmani r-rahim* (Allah the most merciful and most kind) and *Allah ho Akbar* (Allah the Greatest), these attributes are implied and these are based on the Holy Quran.

Apart from these three religions, with the danger of over-generalization, one might say that in all the religions the Absolute Being is considered to be the source of power and love. When Rudolf Otto explained the meaning of *noumenon* (the Ultimate Reality) through the words *tremendum et fascinans* (terrifying and fascinating), the underlying idea is that the Absolute Being is the source of power and love.

2. The Kingdom and the Familial Socio-Economic Values

The economic relationship of the Kingdom, if viewed from the standpoint of today's interpretation of justice, is thoroughly unjust. One man works for one hour, another for five hours and another eleven hours; but all are paid equally! (Mt 20:1-16). Such a situation occurs in a harmonious family where the unemployed grandmother, the dependent little children, the bedridden adult and so on are often given even better treatment than the earning members of the family. "From each man according to his capacity and to each man according to his need" is more a family ideal than a political one. No political society which upholds commutative justice can blame the so called 'Rich Fool' of Lk. 12 and the 'Heartless Rich Man' of Lk.16. If the money earned by the father, if the gifts received by the mother, and if the income generated by the elder brother are not shared, it will cease to be an ideal family. The judgment passed by the Eternal Judge on the people who were at His left side is quite unintelligible in a political society (Mt.25:41 ff.). In which country is there a law that it is the duty of each citizen to feed his hungry and to house his homeless fellow-citizens?

The social relations upheld in the Kingdom Project too belong to the family ideals. The best expression of it is found in Christ's reaction when He was told that His mother and brothers were waiting to see Him. Stretching out his hand towards His disciples He said: "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in Heaven, he is my brother and sister and my mother" (Mt.12:50). 'Doing the will of His Father' can be interpreted as belonging to God's Kingdom. If the members of the Kingdom are called mothers, brothers, sisters, then the KG Ideal is very similar to the WF Ideal. Well, Jesus Himself expressed it in these many words when He said: "You, however must

not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and He is in heaven" (Mt. 23: 8-9). This world family ideal is present in what St. Paul says: "This then is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural takes its name" (Eph. 3:14). Elsewhere in the same epistle, Paul upholds this ideal saying: "So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors: you are citizens like all the saints, and part of **God's household**" (2:19). Because of this family ideal, in the Kingdom, the economically poor and the socially marginalized have a privileged place with special caring and sharing, as in an ideal family.

It is in this context we have to interpret Christ's teaching about forgiveness and about loving our enemies. If the family members do not forgive each other such a family would cease to be a family. Forgiveness is part and parcel of the Kingdom ideal.

3. *"Freedom of the Children of God" and the Familial Freedom*

Here, our interest is to speak of freedom as something flowing from the Abba-experience, and we shall overlook other aspects of freedom. In the light of the following Pauline text, let us at least have a glimpse of this 'freedom of the children of God':

Now before we came of age we were as good as slaves to the elemental principles of this world, but when the appointed time came, God sent His Son... to redeem the subjects of the Law and to enable us to be adopted as sons. The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, 'Abba' Father', and it is this makes you a son, you are not a slave any more: and if God has made you son, then He has made you heir (Gal.4:3-7).

I usually explain the slavish, servile and filial interpretations of law by a parable. A land lord decided to make a foreign trip. Before his departure he called his slaves and gave the following instruction: "See that you water every day our groves and orchards so that the trees may bear abundant fruit." Then he called his servants and asked them to irrigate the paddy fields regularly for a fixed rate as wages. Finally he called his son and told him to water the flower beds in the courtyard of

his mansion. When he returned after a month he asked the slaves and the servants whether they had obeyed his orders. The slaves in fear said that they had fulfilled his instruction, and the servants requested the master for the wages for doing the job as they were told. Then he called his son and said: "Vatsal, these flower-beds look so beautiful. I am sure that you must have been watering these plants everyday." Vatsal fearlessly said: "No daddy, I did not water the plants even for a day. From the day you left till three or four days ago it has rained almost everyday. I made these furrows to let the excess water out."

In this example, who obeyed the land lord truly and meaningfully? Only his son did. He obeyed by 'disobeying' using the freedom of a son knowing the mind and spirit of his father because of his deep love for him. His father's interests are bound up with his own as he is heir to him.

4. Compassionate Judgement in the Familial and the Kingdom Structures

Once I was watching a teenager being accused for some mischief before his mother by their two neighbours. The mother chided the boy and gave him a slap which caused him hardly any pain. The boy was told to get out of her presence. Then the mother began to give many reasons justifying the mischievous behaviour of her son after asking pardon for the damage caused by him. The truth of the matter is that the judgement of a mother on her son is with a lot of love and understanding. When we see faults of others, if we follow the values of the Kingdom of God, we will judge him as our son, brother, nephew and so on.

Jesus unambiguously says, "Do not judge and you will not be judged" (Mt 7:1 ff). The parents, teachers, superiors, elders and so on, have the duty of correcting and guiding their wards. How is it possible without making a judgment on the actions of their wards? Here again the insistence is on compassion and love in judging and correcting. In the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee (Lk 18:9-14), the Pharisee points an accusing finger at the Publican because he has not experienced God's unmerited grace or His forgiving love. One of the most attractive scenes in the NT is the one where Jesus forgives an adulteress woman when no sinless person remained on the scene to stone her (Jn. 8::3 ff.).

In the *Mahabharata*, there is a story: Lord Krishna meets Yudhishtira, the leader of the righteous group, the *Pandavas*, and Duryodhana, the leader of the unrighteous group, the *Kauravas*. He told Duryodhana, the 'anti-hero', to take the census of the good people; and Yudhishtira, the good character; to take the census of the evil persons of the capital, Hastinapur. After a month Duryodhana came to Lord Krishna and reported that there was not a single good person in the city. He pointed out so much evil in the so-called good people like the hermits, social workers and other do-gooders. According to Yudhishtira's report, all were good including murderers, prostitutes and robbers. The moral of the story is that an evil person sees only evil even in good people and a good person sees good even in evil persons. This will explain Christ's love for the 'unlovable'. The 'Sons of the Kingdom' are supposed to have such a compassionate and loving heart open to the 'unlovable'. 'Celebrating the faults and failures of others' is far from the Kingdom Ideals.

5. Kingdom Leadership vis-à-vis Familial Leadership

In any human community there is the need of leadership. But in the Kingdom community, unlike the secular communities, the leader will be serving. "The Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority are called benefactors. But not so with you; let the greatest among you become as the smallest, and the leader as the one who serves" (Lk 22: 26-27). While establishing the Kingdom community in a sacramental way in the cenacle, the Master and the Lord washed the feet of His disciples like a slave, and asked them to do the same (Jn. 13: 1 ff).

This Kingdom value proposed by Christ is one of its most revolutionary aspects. The power and privileges of the leader is to empower those under his/her, and to make the individuals in particular and the group as a whole to grow and to be fruitful to their fullest potential. But such a leadership happens even today in relatively good families. The leadership of the father and mother are intended by them are for the good of the other family members, though a father can be too authoritarian or a mother can be too pampering.

6. Kingdom Equality and Familial Equality

In the democracies there is confusion as regards this concept. In what sense human beings are equal? Is there equality in a family where there are grand parents, younger ones and elders? Among other things if we look in terms of opportunities of meaningful growth and human dignity, we find real equality in both of these ideals. This aspect of the Kingdom value is very similar to what we said about leadership. Jesus emphatically taught this message of equality by word (Mt 23:8-11) and by example, especially by His table-fellowship (Cf. Mt. 9:9-13). For the Jews, table fellowship meant equality in a very special sense. Indeed, the Samaritan woman was surprised when Jesus asked her for drinking water (Jn. 4). According to Paul, in Jesus Christ, who is *autobasilea* (kingdom personified), "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

7. Concern for the Last and the Lowest in the Kingdom and in the Families

The concept *Anawim* in Hebrew means not only the economically poor but also the socially marginalized with no human dignity. In the Indian context this term could be used for the untouchables. Apart from St. Mark's brief, pointed, declaration of the arrival of the Kingdom (Mk 1:15) we have a sort of three 'inaugural' speeches of Jesus about His Project Kingdom at the beginning of His Public Life: The Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 5-7, Sermon on the plain as a counterpart of the former in Lk. 6, and Jesus' inaugural speech in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk. 4). In the Beatitudes, at the beginning of these sermons, Luke just says "How happy are you poor: yours is the Kingdom of God" (6:20). Whereas Mathew adds "poor in spirit" (5:3), which is a translation of the Aramaic *inwanayya* or *anawim* which means people of diminished human worth, of diminished human dignity due to socio-economic reasons, and due to diseases like leprosy and blindness. In Luke's inaugural speech, reading Isaiah 61:1-2, Jesus affirms His stand for the economically poor and the socially oppressed and marginalized. "He has sent me to bring the good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free" (4:18).

Why are the poor happy? Is it because they will have their pie up in heaven, as interpreted in the past? What Christ meant was that in the new socioeconomic order of the Kingdom, the economic relations would be such that the rich would share their riches with the poor. If Jesus said that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom (Mt 19:24), he also declared in the house of a rich man called Zacchaeus, "Today, salvation has come to this house" (Lk 19:9). Why? Because the rich man was willing to share what he had with others (Lk 19:8). This is an example of familial economy and justice.

8. Kingdom Justice and Familial Justice

Jesus said: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness (Gk. *DikaioSYne*, Justice, Sanskrit, *dharma*) exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt. 5:20). At the wake of Liberation Theology there is much talk on fighting for justice. Usually justice is understood as giving each person according to his/her due. If it is so, in terms of commutative justice, the 'boss' of KG, either as the Father of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15) or as the Benevolent Employer (Mt. 20) is patently unjust. The justice of the KG goes far beyond this concept of justice. I prefer to call it the **Kingdom Justice or Familial Justice** rather than **Social Justice**. I would not like to substitute it by 'love' since it can imply that the beneficiary is benevolently treated not because he/she has a right for it but only because of the generosity of the giver. True there is a strong emphasis on justice in the Kingdom ideal. However, it is over shadowed by the teachings of economic sharing, fellowship, loving the last and the least including ones own enemies. In short the justice of the Kingdom is fit for a united and loving family.

III. Our Way of Entering into Dialogue

A little more than a decade ago I was attending a seminar on Christian Fundamentalism in Manila, Philippines. I had the opportunity of meeting various groups of fundamentalists including those with military names like the Navigators of the Lord, Crusaders for World Conquest, etc. For the seminar, we had invited the representatives from some five groups for a panel discussion. All of them propounded the ideal that only those who have been baptized through the Holy Spirit and have had the experience of having been born again could attain eternal salvation.

According to them not only the Non-Christians but also the Christians of the Main Line Churches who did not receive the baptism of the spirit will go to eternal hell. When I asked them whether they believed that the Christian God is a God of love, two of them with many familiar and unfamiliar Biblical quotations tried to prove to me that He is Love Itself. One spoke about God's unconditional love quoting a number of biblical verses and said that any sin is forgiven by God, provided that we go to Him in repentance.

I told them bluntly that in spite of their quotations, the God whom they believed in is very much like the devil I had read about in the Bible. In spite of the uproar, shouting, "blasphemy, blasphemy!", I managed to put in the following words, when slowly silence was being restored:

Please listen to me. You say that God created, as an expression of His love, the whole of humanity within the universe. But this God watches daily more than one and a half billion Christians of the Main Line Churches move towards eternal damnation day-in and day-out. Similarly he watches with no particular concern or interest more than a billion Chinese, a billion Muslims and some 800 millions Hindus move towards eternal hell 'where the fire never gets extinguished and where the worms die not'. He is not a loving person if he does not do anything to stop this horror. He is sadistically cruel to watch the eternal torture and pain of his creatures when he could stop this horror by his supreme power. Certainly he is totally unwise to create and preside over such a horrible creation. The attributes of sadistic cruelty, the supreme power unwilling to help the hapless tortured billions, and unwise and loveless decisions, and so on, belong to my concept of the devil.

The basis of Christian faith is the experience of God as love (1 Jn. 4: 8 and 16), as an unconditionally loving Father (Lk. 15), and all humans as brothers and sisters (Mt. 23:8 and 9). We called this experience of various degrees of intensity and depth *Abba Experience* and we affirmed that it is the basis of the KG ideal. This is the reason why the Church insists that our approach to the Non-Christians should be with respect, openness and love.

Here an important point has to be made very briefly. One of the aspects of our faith commitment is our faith in the uniqueness of Christ

for our Salvation²⁵. We shall not get into the various NT texts and their interpretations according to which salvation is only through Christ: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn. 14:6). "For of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved" (AA 4:12). "For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus who gave himself as ransom for them all" (1 Tim. 2: 5-6). How can we find some sort of openness in these kinds of absolutistic statement?

It is far beyond the scope of this paper to answer this question somewhat satisfactorily. We shall make briefly a few points which could lead one to some meaningful answers. The first point is that we should read these apparently exclusivistic texts in the context of inclusivistic ones. We have given above considerable amount of space for this latter type of texts. Often theologians try to answer this question taking recourse to what they call 'Logos-theology' of the Apostolic Fathers. Here the inclusivistic aspect of Christ's name, namely the 'Cosmic Christ', is taken up²⁶. Some theologians consider these exclusive texts in terms of 'Love-language' of legitimate 'exaggeration' rather than 'the Science-language' of precision and accuracy.

Non-Christian Scriptures in the Dialogal Context

After contextual involvement when the liberation theologians read the Bible they saw it in a new light. These theologians took seriously the socio-economic context. For us in India Religious Pluralism is another challenging contextual reality. This context leads us to biblical texts which are dialogue friendly. We can also make use of the non-Christian scriptures to get in touch with the dialogue friendly texts and texts that promote WF ideals.

One of the Rigvedic text very often quoted by the Christians as well as the Hindus is the following: *Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti* (=Truth is one but sages interpret diversely, Rg. 1:164:46) cfr. also *Ekam santam bahudha kalpayanti* (=Though truth is one, it is diversely

²⁵ Cfr. Ishanand, *Raw Materials for an Indian Theology*, Chapter-8, pp.283-318

²⁶ For a rather detailed study, Cfr. Ishanand, *Raw Materials for an Indian Theology*, op.cit., pp.310-315

imagined, Rg. 10:114:5). Since Hinduism is very much a dialoging religion the non-Hindus can find many such texts without laboriously looking for them. Islam however is usually considered not as a dialogue friendly religion. But once some initiatives were taken up for Christian-Muslim dialogue especially in the West, people began to point out various Quranic texts which are open to other religions. One of such texts is found in Quran 29:46: "Our God and your God is One; and it is to Whom we bow". Another Quranic verse which is often quoted in the dialogal context is the following: "To each among you have prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute" (5:48).

Inter-Religious Dialogue and Nation Building

In the Chennai allocution (1986) Pope John Paul II said that for creating a better world we need inter-religious dialogue which proceeds from the "internal drive of charity". A little more than a decade back a Christian priest invited me to inaugurate a bridge on the river Manimala to help the pilgrims to reach Shabarimala through a short-cut. In the building of this bridge contributions in money and hard labour were made by Hindus, Muslims and Christians. On the inauguration day as on the days of the common works, women from all the three religions cooked food together and served it to all the participants.

Conclusion

A crying need of our country is the creation of an inter-religious front to oppose all pervading corruption. The so-called people who seem to be advocating the value of *dharma* do not seem to do much effectively to oppose *adharma* – in this case the *adharma* of corruption. This *adharma* is very powerful. But if all the religions in India bring their resources together they can effectively oppose the *adharma* of corruption. But unfortunately for us in India there are rivalries among religions and are divided among themselves.

There could be many other areas for dialogal cooperation. Education and medical care for the poor, finding employment for the unemployed,

establishing homes for the aged, etc. are very much in need of inter-religious collaboration. But it is far beyond the scope of this paper to describe dialogal action in many such sectors. Indeed, dialogue in terms of *Jnana* (inter-religious research, seminars, etc.), *karma* (dialogal action in various fields) and *bhakti* (inter-religious prayer, celebrations of festival) is very much in keeping with the Indian Ethos and it can make our country more and more united and powerful. Jai Hind.

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Editorial

Vatican II is estimated as the most significant event in the modern history of the Catholic Church. The Council is much more than the 16 documents it produced; it was an event that is to be interpreted by its continuity in the living tradition of the Church, its mystery and the mystery of God's creation and salvation in history. Council documents and statements are often quoted for apparently contradictory view points and positions, and the faithful are sometimes confused and even scandalized. All students of the history of the Catholic Church and of the Ecumenical Councils know that all the documents and statements of the ecumenical councils are the result of a long process involved by numerous persons, church leaders, theologians, drafters and editors, and the final product is the result of a long evolutionary process. It is quite natural that the final documents contain several ambiguities, anomalies and even contradictions as a result of the different views of participants that require an inclusive approach and even compromises. This makes the interpretation of the Council Documents an extremely difficult task. This number of *Jeevadhara* is, in general, on the subject of interpretation of the Council documents of Vatican II.

Any text, ancient or past, is in need of interpretation, as the context of text, its content, trend of thought, its language and style are not familiar to the present reader. The reader has to be first introduced to the world of the text and its author, its socio-cultural, ethical, philosophical, ideological, religious and political milieu in order to understand the text. The modern science of 'Hermeneutics' has developed the process of interpreting ancient texts, especially, religious and literary. Of course, there are different schools of hermeneutics. Some schools give more importance to the text as such, where as others emphasize the author, his/her background, influences, ideas and his/her intentions. Take, for

example, the case of a Biblical text. As the text is divinely inspired, it can stand by itself, irrespective of the ideas of the human author/authors. When we focus on the author/authors several questions arise: What did Jesus mean by His Words and parables? What did the writers/Evangelists mean by the text? What did the redactors/editors/early Christian community mean by the text? As it is Word of God “for us today”, what does the text mean for us today? So there are different layers of meanings in a text. The meaning of the text has to be constantly discovered by interpretation and re-interpretation. The text is thus open to further developments and process.

In the first article, Martin Kallungal deals with the question of interpretation of Vatican II and the Conciliar texts in general. He approaches the question in a holistic way from three angles, text, author and readers in the light of recent studies on the hermeneutics of Vatican II. He proposes a heuristic approach that provides a master key for understanding the ‘event’ of Vatican II, rather than its isolated texts. In the second article, Dominic Veliath, deals with the question of interpretation of *Lumen Gentium*, the central document of Vatican II. The author points out the novelty of Vatican II and explains how *Lumen Gentium* introduces a new approach of presenting the Church in her ‘relatedness’ to all realities, other Churches, religions, cultures and the world. The method is not ‘either/or’, but ‘both/and’. It is a shift from dialectical tensions to creative polarities, polarity of Immanent and historical, unity and plurality, charismatic and institutional, church and the world. The Council thus called for a ‘New Way of Being Church’. This approach is very promising, though there may be some doctrinal problems, which have to be still sorted out and clarified.

In the third article the present editor, Kuncheria Pathil, highlights the ecclesiology of Vatican II in the background of the historical developments in the Church. He outlines the ecclesiological status of the other Churches as expounded by the Council which grants only some or many elements of the One Church in other Churches, whereas the Catholic Church claims that it alone has the ‘fullness’ of ecclesial reality. The author calls for a rethinking and reinterpretation of the ecclesial status of the other Churches in the context of the progress we made in

the ecumenical movement in fifty years after the Council. Time has come that the main line Churches prepare themselves for an ecumenical leap towards mutual recognition of the Churches on the basis of substantial doctrinal convergence on the questions of ministry and sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism. Unity and plurality among the Churches have to be held together in common faith, love and hope in a creative polarity and inclusiveness.

In the fourth article, Errol D'Lima clarifies the understanding of Vatican II on "Kingdom of God, Church and World" and their intimate inter-relationship. One of the major theological thrust of the Council is a shift from the Church to the World, which is the central stage of God's presence and action. The Church is presented as the sacrament which makes manifest God's presence and action in the World. This fresh outlook on the world underlines the value of other religions and cultures and promotes interreligious and intercultural dialogue as the new way of being the Church. In the last article, Vincent Kundukulam introduces very briefly the "science of interpretation" (hermeneutics) in order to familiarize our readers to the world of 'hermeneutics'. At the beginning of this editorial, I have already indicated the problem and need of interpretation. In simple terms the author initiates us to the 'science of hermeneutics' and its different schools and trends, which is in fact very enchanting.

The approach to truth, its perception, articulation and interpretation is an area where there are different views and trends of thought. In the Western classical approach if one thing or proposition is true, its opposite cannot be true, and it is based on one of the first principles of Greek philosophy, called 'the principle of contradiction'. It is said to be an 'either-or' approach. But the Asian, especially Indian, approach is 'both-and'. If something or statement is claimed to be true, its opposite can also be true. It is an inclusive approach of 'creative polarity'. According to many authors and interpreters of Vatican II, the Council has made a shift from 'either-or' to 'both-and' by taking the approach of 'relationality'. Everything in the Universe is inter-related, including all branches of knowledge, religions and cultures. Some authors think that in the documents we have the juxtaposition of conflicting and even contradictory

views with the hope of an emerging synthesis in the 'receptive process' of interpretation. Some others think, in the light of the trend of post-modernity that any 'grand synthesis' is no more possible today in our pluralistic and processive world of relationality. However, the search for truth will be always continued maintaining the tension of creative polarity and 'unity in plurality'. Interpretation of the various Council documents and the event of the Council has to be continued with an attitude of learning, critical openness, organic growth and relationality. The age of one-sided 'absolute claim', exclusion and condemnation is gone.

Vatican II documents are to be taken, as someone has pointed out, not as a point of arrival, but as a point of departure. Those documents are not the last word on anything, but an invitation to move beyond them taking the cue from the call and inspiration of the Council for change and growth. Fifty years after the Council is a *kairos*, a God-given time to interpret the Council and its documents in ever fresh and new ways and lead the Church to new horizons.

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Hermeneutical Keys for the Interpretation of the Texts of Vatican II

Martin Sebastian Kallungal

In this article, the author approaches the question of interpretation of the documents of Vatican II from three angles: author, text and readers. After bringing out several important hermeneutical keys to understand the authorial, textual and receptional dimensions of the Conciliar texts, he proposes that a heuristic approach would help us to identify one master key for understanding the event of Vatican II. Martin Sebastian Kallungal obtained a PhD in Hindu Philosophy from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, India and a PhD in Systematic Theology from KU Leuven, Belgium. He is currently teaching at the Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Alwaye, India and at the KU Leuven Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Belgium.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church had two main aims: retrieving the sound traditions of the Church (*ressourcement*) and helping the Church in her concerted effort to make herself up to date in the world (*aggiornamento*). *Ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* were not two unrelated or, much less, contrary projects. In the Conciliar period, the former led to and legitimized the latter; but, in the post-Conciliar period, together as a two-headed project, *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* continue to ensure genuine renewals at all fronts.¹ The two-headed project of renewal, which took the shape of the Conciliar

¹ Whether or not all reforms in the Church bring about genuine renewal is a different question. See, Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert, O.P., (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011).

(historical) event, cannot not be confused with the post-Conciliar event of the reception of the Council. After the event of the Council, which readily provided the Church with sixteen documents, there dawned an era of interpretations. As Pope Paul VI has succinctly put, renewal in the post-Conciliar Church requires from her to develop an “enlightened insight into the Council’s spirit” and “faithful application of the norms [the Council] has set forth in such a felicitous and holy manner.”² In Ormond Rush’s reading of the Pope’s words, “both (1) enlightened insight into the spirit of the Council and (2) faithful application of the Council’s norms are hermeneutical tasks.”³ Basing himself on this conviction, Rush has made a commendable effort to bring out some important hermeneutical principles for engaging the documents of Vatican II. This article, which aims to bring out some important keys to understand VaticanII, will be situated within the hermeneutical explorations that Rush has undertaken in his *Still Interpreting Vatican II* (2004) and the later research and discussions concerning some crucial aspects of the interpretation and application of what the Church has secured in Vatican II. Since the question of hermeneutical keys is a meta-methodological question, some preliminary clarificatory remarks are in order.

Preliminary Remarks

Any attempt to interpret theological texts like the documents of the second Vatican Council has to be made with clear pre-understanding about the distinction as well as inter-relation between macro-hermeneutical and micro-hermeneutical realities. Macro-hermeneutics refers to general theories of interpretation; and according to such theories, there is nothing in human experience and knowledge that is independent of interpretation.⁴ On the other hand, micro-hermeneutics, which refers

² Cited in Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), ix.

³ Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, ix-x.

⁴ Martin Heidegger and Richard Rorty, to cite two prominent figures from two competing philosophical traditions in the West, although differing in their attitudes to special hermeneutical theories, do consider any “interpretation-free understanding of what ultimately is” as meaningless. See, Hebert L. Dreyfus, “Heidegger’s Hermeneutic Realism,” in *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture*, 40.

to special theories of interpretation, claims that each instance of understanding occurs within its own particular contexts and coordinates.⁵ A theologian who is aware of macro-hermeneutical realities in a process of understanding will have to pay special attention to all different constitutive aspects of knowledge. As hermeneutical thinkers have neatly put, an act of understanding has, at least, three elements: interpreter (one who communicates/understands), interpretament (that which is communicated/understood), and the process of interpretation (the manner of communication/understanding).⁶ These elements concur with distinct or shared aspects of the hermeneutical trio of author/reader, text, and writing/reading. Micro-hermeneutical sensibilities prompt us to locate the authorial, textual, and receptional elements of meaning within the historical and theological context of texts.

Understanding Vatican II: Some Interpretive Keys

The Spirit of the Council

There could be meaning without intentions, but in the case of texts that have developed thanks to the contributions from many, intention of authors is very important for seizing the meaning of texts correctly. The authorial intention of the Conciliar texts can be reconstructed by a careful study of the Conciliar proceedings. In the field of hermeneutics of Vatican II, authorial intention is generally referred to by the so called “spirit of the Council” (in distinction with the “letter of the Council” namely, the documents), which in Rush’s understanding, has two senses:

This position is called hermeneutic universalism: “interpretation is a universal and ubiquitous feature of all human activity.” See, David R. Hiley, James F. Bohman, and Richard Shusterman, “Introduction: The Interpretive Turn,” in *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture*, 7.

⁵ This is known as hermeneutic contextualism: “Positively contextualism means that anything must be understood within some presupposed context, whole, or hermeneutic circle. Negatively, it denies atomism, the view that something could be understood by itself independent of such contexts and could somehow be the incorrigible and the foundational building blocks for knowledge.” See, Hiley, Bohman, and Shusterman, “Introduction: The Interpretive Turn,” 7-8.

⁶ See, David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 10.

a) the mind of the Council, which is practically nothing other than the mind of the Council fathers; and b) the mind of God which through the work of the Holy Spirit shaped the minds of the Council fathers. Strict historical-critical investigations are of great help in unraveling the former. But, when one proceeds with a thoroughgoing analysis of all that happened before, during, and after the Council one is likely to be puzzled by the plotting, lobbying, debates, disagreements, etc., that make the history of the Council liken to any political history. Out of this puzzlement might have grown, I suppose, much of the distrust in historical-critical approach to the Council. Such distrust in critical rationality has led many to opt for an anti-hermeneutical approach to the Council, which eventually got transformed into an unprofitable quarrel about methods. The real handicap of historical-critical method in the context of Vatican II studies, in my estimation, is not that it sheds light on many seemingly unpleasant details in the actual history of the Council, but that it has no *organon* on its part to discover the mind of God that has somehow unfolded itself in the course of the Conciliar event. If this estimation is right, then along with historical-critical scholarship that brings out the first sense of the authorial intention, we need to develop new theological sensibilities that can capture the manifold ways in which God works in and through actual history. Rush proposes that we need a theological hermeneutics of Vatican II that is a) informed by a particular pneumatology, which in turn is b) coherent with a theological anthropology that explores the way grace works in human affairs, and c) a theory of history that narrates God's involvement in human lives.⁷ The new pneumatology, theological anthropology, and theory of history that Rush proposes are theologies that give sufficient importance to active human reception of the Catholic tradition.

As a matter of fact, the Council itself was an event of reception; it re-received the Catholic tradition so that it could transmit that tradition to the future generations. Since the Conciliar event involves re-reception and updating of tradition, questions concerning continuity and discontinuity in Church renewals, as they were proposed in the documents and some of which are already underway, remain and will always remain as a

⁷ Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, 100, n. 60.

crucial issue in the Church. As a matter of fact, much of the discussion on interpretation of Vatican II is already dominated by the arguments for or against continuity and discontinuity between *the Church according to the Council* and *the Church before the Council*. It is, however, interesting to note that with such historical and theological debates the focus of interpretation of the Conciliar documents has been redirected to interpretation of the nature of continuity and discontinuity in ecclesial tradition. Can we once again narrow down our focus on interpretation of the Conciliar texts?

As mentioned previously, there were conflicting opinions in the Council aula. But, the ingenuity of the drafting committee helped the Council fathers to represent the unresolved conflicting positions in the final texts as well. The juxtaposition of conflicting view-points does not in any way weaken the Conciliar texts. On the other hand, one has to recognize juxtaposition as the preferred new way of presenting the true spirit of the Council, which reaches its completion only through ongoing conscious reception that leads to a new synthesis of varied views in particular ecclesial contexts. As Pope Paul VI has said, “since the Council had not intended to resolve all the problems raised, some were reserved for future study by the Church, some were presented in restricted and general terms, and therefore they remain open to further and deeper understanding and a variety of applications.”⁸ Many have happily taken up the task of continuing the interpretative reception of the Council. Already in 1979 Karl Rahner wrote about the theological work that had to be continued in the new avenues opened up by the Council.⁹ Likewise, in the recent times, Neil Ormerod urges interpreters of the Conciliar documents to build on genuine developments that have happened in Catholic thinking, especially in the field of ecclesiology.¹⁰

The Style of the Council

The genre, structure, and style of the documents are not only unique compared to the previous Councils but also capable of possibilizing

⁸ Quoted in Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, 29.

⁹ See, Karl Rahner, “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* (1979): 716–727.

¹⁰ Neil J. Ormerod, “The Times They are A Changin’”: A Response to O’Malley and Schloesser,” *Theological Studies* 67/4 (December, 2006): 834–855.

development in thought without distancing from the hard core of our faith-deposit. In order to materialize these possibilities, one has to pay attention to the textual specificities. However, unlike many structuralists, post-structuralists and deconstructionists, who believe in the death of the author and hence pay exclusive attention to the texts, theological interpreters have to study texts without forgetting the intentions of authors and what the texts might mean for readers. One of the ways to maintain such an integral approach to the study of the Conciliar documents is to keep oneself always alert to the salient features of the literary form used therein. Such features that bear on meaning emergence in the Conciliar documents include, a) the overall pastoral intent that is evident in every effort made for updating the Church, b) absence of any propositional statements and formal condemnation of errors, and c) new ecclesial teaching style that makes only appeals, exhortations, and recommendations to people of good will, in general, and Catholic believers, in particular.

Scholars like John W. O'Malley urges interpreters of Vatican II to use rhetorical devices if they want to understand the Council adequately and to abstain from proof-texting while using the Conciliar texts in theological writing.¹¹ The underlying assumption behind the recent insistence on the necessity of close attention to literary aspects of the Conciliar documents is that both style and content are integral aspects of textuality. The style of ecclesial teaching has definitely changed with Vatican II; and in that sense, there is also certain development in ecclesial self-understanding. To put differently, there is "continuity in the *what* of being the Church" but there is discontinuity in "the *how* of being the Church."¹² "Persuasion" became the new way of Church teaching, and "dialogue" became the new way of learning and collaboration.¹³ In

¹¹ John W. O'Malley, "Vatican II: Historical Perspectives on Its Uniqueness and Interpretation," in Lucian Richard, et.al., (eds.) *Vatican II, The Unfinished Agenda: A Look to the Future* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 25, as cited in Rush, *Interpreting Vatican II*, 37-38.

¹² In Rush's reading, "it is possible to speak of a deliberately intended micro-rupture with other eras, particularly the ecclesial style of the Pius era (Pius IX-Pius XII)." See, Rush, *Interpreting Vatican II*, 38.

¹³ Rush, *Interpreting Vatican II*, 38.

addition to the genre and style, Vatican II documents are characterized by distinct structure and inter-relations within as well as between documents. The way a particular text is structured can sometimes tell us something that is not explicitly said in the text. For instance, Rush has shown that it is through a comparative structural analysis *Lumen Gentium* and its earlier draft *De Ecclesia* that we come to know that the primary receiver of revelation is the whole People of God, and not the hierarchy.¹⁴ Like structural analysis, inter-textual interpretation is also very promising. The 1985 Synod of Bishops had already asked the interpreters of Conciliar documents employ inter-textual interpretation “so that the integral meaning of the Council’s affirmations – often very complex – might be understood and expressed.”¹⁵ However, inter-textual interpretation is a delicate task which requires from us a comprehensive understanding of the overall theological vision of the Conciliar textual corpus. One has to know if and where development of Catholic teaching has happened. Sometimes an insight or understanding that actually came so late in the Council will have to be used in our present day interpretation of earlier teachings. Genuine development of teaching (that is, progress in the ecclesial reception of revelation) must, then, be the criterion for setting the order of inter-textual interpretations. That is, sometimes an interpreter will have to prefer the evident progress in the ecclesial reception of revelation as a surer key to inter-documental understanding than other more explicit keys such as the order of promulgation, canonical weightage, the order in the hierarchy of truths, etc. For instance, Karl Rahner has made some pioneering inter-textual studies and proposed that “*Dei Verbum* [...] although promulgating teaching regarding a ‘higher’ doctrine according to the hierarchy of truths, must be interpreted (re-interpreted) in the light of the other documents.”¹⁶

The Reception of the Council

Although the authors have a distinct intention and texts are definite in terms of genre, vocabulary, structure, and style, the world of meaning

¹⁴ Rush, *Interpreting Vatican II*, 39-40.

¹⁵ *Documents of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops November 28 – December 08, 1985*, (Homebush, Australia: St. Paul Publications, 1986), 22.

¹⁶ Rush, *Interpreting Vatican II*, 43.

that is opened up in the course of reading has ever-widening horizons. Since the meaning appropriated by readers of a text could be greater than what might have been intended by its authors, one could say that texts grow with their readers. Meaning is indeed a dynamic reality. This implies that reception is an integral aspect communication. It is only recently that we have started to take the receptional aspects of the understanding of Conciliar texts seriously. Scholars have noticed many factors that bear on the process of reception, like, socio-cultural location, local history, other personal particularities such as gender, class, etc. It is when people from different locations and with ever so many identities and interests receive the Conciliar texts that they “participate in” and perpetuate the Conciliar event.¹⁷ This is why Walter Kasper put it as strongly as this: “What is at issue for Catholic theology, therefore, is not the Council itself. What is in question is the interpretation and reception of the Council.”¹⁸

In Alois Grillmeier’s view, the reception of the Conciliar documents has three dimensions: kerygmatic, theological and spiritual. The *kerygmatic* reception is related to whether or not a teaching is accepted within a local church or between local churches. *Theological* reception refers to ongoing reflection on the Conciliar teaching by theologians in the local churches. *Spiritual* reception refers to the practical assimilation by the People of God of a teaching.¹⁹ While reading the Conciliar texts, readers are not only taking along with them what is said in the texts but also giving meaning to them. It is through such dynamics of taking and giving of meaning that a text lives in history. Rush says it so well when he remarks that “a text is dead if it is not read” and that “Vatican II is not achieved until it is received.”²⁰ Technically, while highlighting the

¹⁷ According to Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), “[Council’s historical significance will be determined by the process of clarification and elimination that takes place subsequently in the life of the Church. In this way, the whole Church participates in the Council; it does not come to an end in the assembly of bishops.” Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 53.

¹⁸ Cited in Rush, *Interpreting Vatican II*, 52.

¹⁹ For a summary of Grillmeier’s views in this regard, see, Rush, *Interpreting Vatican II*, 54-55.

²⁰ Rush, *Interpreting Vatican II*, 55.

receptional aspect of the Conciliar event what is being retrieved and saved is the *sensus fidelium*. It was Vatican II, especially *Dei Verbum* and *Lumen Gentium* that played a great role in reclaiming *sensus fidelium* its rightful place along with the other four criteria of authentic revelation: scripture, tradition, magisterium, and theology.

Having approached the question of interpretation of the Conciliar documents from the angles of authorial intentions, textual meaning, and receptional possibilities, let us now examine and see if there is one master key to the understanding of Vatican II.

Integral Exigency: A Master Key

It would be more helpful, in my estimation, to re-conceive the inevitable circularity (which refers to the structure of knowing) involved in acts of knowledge as heuristic circularity, where the term “heuristic” which comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, means “to find out” or “to discover.”²¹ From a heuristic point of view, coming to understand the Catholic tradition as it is re-received in the Conciliar event and engaging all aspects of the present day life in light of that renewed tradition are the two functions of post-Conciliar theology. Thus, tradition and innovation are not opposed to each other; continuity and discontinuity can together contribute to the making of a new synthesis.²²

In a recent article, Gerald O’Collins asks what should we make of all the changes brought by Vatican II?²³ Collins cites Ormerod and

²¹ Michael Polanyi can illuminate us on this point. He has the following description for an epistemological event: “we are guided by sensing the presence of a hidden reality toward which our clues are pointing; and the discovery which terminates and satisfies this pursuit is still sustained by the same vision. It claims to have made contact with reality; a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to future eyes in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations.” Michael Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966, Reprint 1983), 24.

²² This reminds us of what Pope Benedict XVI said in his address to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2005: “It is precisely [in a] combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of reform consists.” See, “Interpreting Vatican II: Address to the Roman Curia,” *Origins* 35 (2006), 536 and 538.

²³ Gerard O’Collins, “Does Vatican II Represent Continuity or Discontinuity?” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012), 770-791.

Benedict XVI before he offers his own views. In Ormerod's view the Church needs to discern her old ways and bring about authentic reform through integral conversion. In Pope Benedict XVI's view, the Catholic principles remain permanent while practical forms change in response to historical situations. Collins thinks along the latter view, and further clarifies the renewals achieved by Vatican II in light of a scheme of "essential and non essential."²⁴ We can see that the interlocutors of Collins seem to point to the heuristic structure of renewal in Vatican II. While Benedict XVI's insistence on continuity without ever denying the possibilities of reform confirms the essential role of tradition, Ormerod's invitation to strive for authentic development clarifies the need for change that should happen from within the Catholic tradition. Collins has clarified and confirmed the aspect of continuity in terms of apostolic identity; but, he seems to have ignored the lead offered by Ormerod.²⁵

Conclusion

To live according to the norms of the past all that we need is a sound hermeneutics of tradition; but, if we want to take normativity of the Christian future seriously then we need to adopt a heuristic approach that stresses on innovation founded on tradition. Hermeneutics keeps theology always in a discussion mode while heuristics transforms it into a discovery mode. The conciliar event (as well as the reception of renewal brought by the Council) can be understood to have a heuristic structure, in which case both continuity and discontinuity are important aspects of renewals. Countless juxtapositions at many important junctures in the Conciliar documents vouch for the integral exigency that is unique to the Catholic spirit of the Council. In order to sense this integral exigency interpreters have to identify (or sometimes read into) a "both... and" style, and not an "either... or" way of thinking, in texts.

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²⁴ O'Collins, "Does Vatican II Represent Continuity or Discontinuity?" 793.

²⁵ Ormerod is, for one, who has repeatedly stressed on the need for a serious "theological analysis of what was moving forward at the Council." John D. Dadosky, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Re-Interpretation of Vatican II," *The Heythrop Journal* XLIX (2008), 743.

The Implications of *Lumen Gentium* A New Way of Being Church

Dominic Veliath

The author begins this article with the novelty of Vatican II and explains how *Lumen Gentium* introduces a new approach of presenting the Church in her 'relatedness' to all realities, the other Churches, religions, cultures and the world. The method is not 'either/or', but 'both/and'. It is a shift from dialectical tensions to creative polarities, polarity of Immanent and historical, unity and plurality, charismatic and institutional, church and the world. The Council called for a 'New Way of Being Church'. The author Dominic Veliath sdb is professor of theology at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore, its former principal, the former President of Indian Theological Association, the Secretary of the Doctrinal Commission of CBCI and a member of the International Theological Commission.

I. The Pre-Conciliar Ecclesiological Paradigm

The ecclesiological articulation of Vatican II acquires greater intelligibility in all its nuancing, when situated against the pre-Conciliar paradigm generally current in Roman Catholic circles; since the novelty involved in any change is better highlighted when contrasted with the *chiaroscuro* of a *status quo ante*. At the cost of streamlining issues, it can be categorically asserted that pre-Vatican II ecclesiology tended to be characterized by a strong anti-Protestant bias that was generally prevalent in the post-Tridentine era.

A typical example of one such post-Tridentine stance with this marked anti-Protestant bias is clearly the ecclesiology of Robert Bellarmine (1542 – 1621).¹ Bellarmine's ecclesiology over-emphasized the visible, juridical and hierarchical aspects of the Church; in its understanding, the Church was primarily the hierarchy and clergy; the laity was practically relegated to the status of passive beneficiary of the pastoral care of the hierarchy. It was Bellarmine's intent - against the Reformers - to underscore that the Church was a visible society with a hierarchy and due subordination of members in an ascending scale

The unity of the Church tended to be envisaged as a static "*datum*" received once for always at the establishment of the Church by Jesus Christ. Implied here was the idea of a power given at the beginning by Jesus Christ to His representative, subsequently handed it down to the successors of His representative. Such an understanding was apt to result in the *de facto* identification of unity with uniformity. The iconological understanding of authority, so characteristic of Patristic ecclesiology, for which authority symbolized the visible representation of a transcendent or heavenly power *actually* active in its earthly representative, now tended to be replaced by the concept of a power given at the beginning by Jesus Christ to a representative who took His place and who subsequently handed it on to those who came after him: an emphasis, in which authority risked being first and foremost posited for its own sake; and as a consequence, of being considered from a purely juridical and sociological standpoint and not from a spiritual (*read* Christian) perspective.²

Although, admittedly, a certain rapport between the Church and the world had been acknowledged in some form and to some degree throughout Christian history, it must be equally granted there were periods during which this awareness had almost completely disappeared from

¹ See H. Watrignant, "Bellarmine François Robert Romulus", *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* II, 1, 588 – 595. Mention should be made of the sacramental, mystical ecclesiology of Peter de Bérulle, also a cardinal, which constitutes an important exception to the mainline model of Bellarmine. See in this regard, P. Cochois, *Bérulle et l'école française*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963).

² Cf. Yves Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 62ff.

the consciousness of the People of God, or was reduced to a state of military opposition, or became an expression of an intra-ecclesial conflict between two factions. Generally speaking, the Church was seen as situated in a hostile world; this served to engender an overall negative attitude towards the world and its works. Indicative of this is the fact that the mission of the Church was, at times, imaged as self-defence, in almost military terms.

II. *Lumen Gentium* – Embodiment of a Renewed Ecclesiological Vision

1. *The Novelty of Vatican II*

Anyone browsing through the avant-garde theological writings of the period immediately preceding Vatican II, cannot but be struck by the 'conservatism', (to resort to clichés), of even the most 'progressive' literature of the time.³ Vatican II apparently covered more ground than expected and consequently left many of these goals far behind. Paradoxically, even 'disappointment' with the Council's fruits has been in part due to the 'appetite' which had been whetted by the event of the Council. The spirit that moved the Council clearly transcended the recorded results, so that the achievements of the post-Conciliar period cannot be narrowed down merely to the letter of the Council documents.

³ There are the following volumes which give us a run through what transpired at Vatican II. In the first place, there are the *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, e Civitate Vaticana* 1962 – 1965. Caprile, Giovanni, *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, (Rome: La Civiltà Cattolica, 1968). [This is a five-part work in six volumes, viz., Vol. 1, *Parte 1: Annunzio e Preparazione (1959 – 1960)*; Vol. 1, *Parte 2: Annunzio e Preparazione (1961 – 1962)*; Vol. 2: *Primo Periodo (1962 – 1963)*; Vol. 3: *Secondo Periodo (1963 – 1964)*; Vol. 4: *Terzo Periodo (1964 – 1965)*; Vol. 5: *Quarto Periodo (1965)*]. There is the three-volume work: Alberigo Giuseppe and Komonchak Joseph (eds.), *History of Vatican II*, (New York: Orbis) [Vol. 1: *Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II: Toward a New Era in Catholicism (1995)*; Vol. 2: *The Formation of the Council's Identity. First Period and Intersession. October 1962 – September 1963*; Vol. 3: *The Mature Council. Second Period and Intersession. September 1963 – September 1964*]. The two-volume work: Latourelle René (ed.), *Vatican II. Assessment and Perspectives. Twenty Five Years After*, Vol. 1, (Paulist Press New York 1988); Vol. 2 (Paulist Press 1989). Stacpoole Alberic, *Vatican II By Those Who Were There*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986).

Among the factors which influenced this process was the shift of perspective which had been taking place in much of theological reflection round the world:⁴

- i) New questions were being asked for which there were no ready-made traditional answers.
- ii) Inadequate old answers were at times being thrust upon cultures and regions with new questions.
- iii) Consequently, a leitmotif repeatedly surfaced in several ecclesial communities round the world: the realization that a new awareness of Christian identity was emerging which had not been taken into account by much of traditional theological reflection of the time.
- iv) Furthermore, it would seem that the Neo-Scholastic paradigm, predominant in the West for the past several centuries, was gradually being challenged in its pretensions of being the *only* apt philosophical tool to articulate Roman Catholic ecclesial self-understanding; the viability of other alternatives was also being considered.⁵

As (the then) Professor Joseph Ratzinger observed, the Council's statements should not be considered a body of purely intellectual teaching; still less are they merely a collection of technical and pragmatic directives. They are rather the product of a spiritual process or movement, which can only be comprehended by participating in it, by gradual, step-by-step, involvement in it.⁶ And the professional theologians played an important role in fostering this process.

In contrast to earlier ecumenical councils, during which theologians often addressed the assembled Fathers at plenary sessions, this honour

⁴ Cf. Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (London: SCM Press, 1988), 1-4.

⁵ It is interesting to observe that, among the theological luminaries who participated as *periti* in Vatican II, such as Annibale Bugnini cm, Cardinal Augustine Bea sj, Yves Congar op, Henri de Lubac sj, Jean Daniélou sj, Bishop Helder Pessoa Camara, Karl Rahner sj, Josef Ratzinger, etc., quite a few of them, while having initiated their academic career within the parameters of the Neo-Scholastic paradigm, in course of time, transcended it.

⁶ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), 1.

was given to almost no theologian at the Second Vatican Council;⁷ yet the theologians were humorously styled: the “cooks of the Council”.⁸

The role of theologians (those who were not Fathers of the Council), was clearly delineated in the document: *Ordo Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II Celebrandi*,⁹ issued on August 6, 1962. The fifth chapter of this document dealt with the duties of the theologians, canonists and other experts, appointed by the Pope and officially styled as *periti* in Article 9. Their role was clearly specified in the following Article 10: They took part in the General Congregations and could speak only when asked to. The Presidents of the Commissions could call upon the experts when composing, revising schemas and drafting reports.

On September 28, 1962, the *L'Osservatore Romano* announced an initial list of 224 *periti* who had been appointed by the Pope, the majority of them, members of the Roman Curia, Consultors and Members of the various Preparatory Commissions and Professors of the Ecclesiastical Universities in Rome. These Conciliar *periti* became 348 by April 1963. In all, 281 Conciliar *periti* took part in the entire Council: 9 at three sessions, 63 at two sessions and, 41 at a single session.¹⁰

One must, however, distinguish different “categories” of experts present at the Council. Besides the aforementioned Conciliar *periti* appointed by the Pope, there were the private *periti*, who often accompanied individual bishops. Under this latter category, there were 6 *periti* from India during the Second Session of Vatican II: Fr. Joseph Neuner sj, Fr. I. Extross, Fr. J. Chereath, Fr. Cyril Papali ocd, Fr. Placid Podippara cmi and Fr. Joseph Putz sj.¹¹

⁷ Cf. Mario von Galli quoted in Alberigo, *History of Vatican II*, vol. III, 448.

⁸ Alberigo, *History of Vatican II*, vol. III, 448.

⁹ Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, LIV (1962), 612 – 640.

¹⁰ Cf. Karl Heinz Neufeld, “In the Service of the Council. Bishops and Theologians at the Second Vatican Council. (For Cardinal Henri de Lubac on his Ninetieth Birthday), in Latourelle René (ed.), *Vatican II. Assessment and Perspectives – Twenty Five Years after Vatican II (1962 – 1987)*, Vol. I, (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 81.

¹¹ Cf. Paul Pulikkan, *Indian Church at Vatican II. A Historico-Theological Study of the Indian Participation in the Second Vatican Council*, (Trichur: Marymatha Publications, 2001), 259.

Given the clear guidelines laid down for the working of the *periti*, on one level, there was a great deal of work done by theologians on the drafts. But this work remained outside the Council Hall – a hidden service.¹² And there are ample indications that the theologians made their contribution. For instance, Cardinal Eugene Tisserant complained that “certain *periti* had given talks with the purpose of spreading their own ideas”.¹³ And from another perspective, Cardinal Julius Döpfner suggested that “among the *periti* nominated by the Pope there might also be called those who were particularly competent in the problems that presented difficulties”.¹⁴

Furthermore, the “Talks” or “Round Tables” to which many Episcopal Conferences and Centres of Ecclesiastical Studies were invited, served as fora and occasions for the Council Fathers to meet and converse with the experts.¹⁵

From the perspective of theological trends, there was the influence of the great movements of the Bible, Liturgy, Patristics and Apostolate of the Laity; and in concrete, of the Theological Faculties and Schools of Jerusalem, Louvain, Innsbruck, Saulchoir, Lyon-Fourvière, and the German Faculties.¹⁶

Finally, there was the influence of renowned individual theologians who had already made an impact on Christian thought throughout the world. In this regard, the words of Karl Lehmann with reference to the effectiveness of Karl Rahner sj are a case in point: “Karl Rahner’s effectiveness was not only due to the way in which he took part in the Council, but also to the worldwide reception which his theological thought enjoyed before the Council and which helped prepare the way for the spirit of this Church assembly. As a result of this “authority”, he succeeded

¹² Cf. Neufeld, 75.

¹³ Neufeld, 86.

¹⁴ Neufeld, 83.

¹⁵ See Alberigo II, 170, 243, 363, 396.

¹⁶ Cf. Alberigo III, 451. See also Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, (Adelaide: ATF, 2012) translated by Mary John Ronayne & Mary Cecily Boulding, from the French original: Yves Congar, *Mon Journal du Concile, I & II*: Tome I – 1960 -63; Tome II – 1964 – 66, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2002).

at many points..., in breaking the schemata that had been prepared as finished products into an open country of greater theological freedom".¹⁷

There were other theologians too had a particularly formative influence on the work of the Council. From France: Yves Congar op, Jean Daniélou sj, Henri de Lubac sj; from Belgium: Gommar Michiels ofm (cap), Gérard Philips, Gustave Thils; from The Netherlands: Johannes G.M. Willebrands.¹⁸

To quote Neufeld: "The significance of the collaboration of theological experts at Vatican II, we can take as certain that it was not limited to helping the bishops to formulate their awareness of their faith. They themselves had animated, deepened and strengthened this awareness of faith so that the Church represented at the Council could go out toward the world without fear and with a new confidence in the Lord living within her. She needed first to be reminded once more of many things that had long since been forgotten or had been left inactive in the background. The theologians helped with these discoveries. This produced a new awareness of themselves, that is to say, a knowledge of their own strengths and limits, a mutual association that bore the seal of openness and responsibility".¹⁹

2. *The Church in Her Relatedness*

An important distinction must needs be made between "Plurality", which refers to the multi-dimensionality of human experience; "Relationality", (the issue in question here), refers to the *relatedness* of reality; whereas "Relativism" maintains that the human being can only attain approximations, not the truth. In its core, this latter stance tends to be a negation of realism.

The Conciliar documents touch on different facets of Roman Catholic self-understanding with the Church as their focal point. In the light of this relational emphasis, the documents of Vatican II could be situated around three focal points:

¹⁷ Karl Lehmann, "Karl Rahner" in Vorgrimler and Vander Gucht, *Bilanz de Theologie*, II, 148.

¹⁸ Cf. Alberigo II, 457.

¹⁹ Neufeld, 98.

- a) *The Church in Herself*: The Church as formed by the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*); The Mystery of the Church in Herself (*Lumen Gentium*); The Mystery of the Church as a Communion of Churches (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*); The Mission of the Church in General (*Ad Gentes*); The Worship of the Church (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*); The Members of the Church: - the Bishops (*Christus Dominus*); the Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*); the Religious (*Perfectae Caritatis*); the Formation of Priests (*Optatam Totius*); the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*); Implications of the Mission for Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*); Implications of the Mission for Social Communication (*Inter Mirifica*).
- b) *The Church in Her Relationships*: To Other Christians (*Unitatis Redintegratio*); To Other Religions (*Nostra Aetate*); to the Human Person (*Dignitatis Humanae*)
- c) *The Church and the World*: (*Gaudium et Spes*).

III. *Lumen Gentium* – An Articulation of the Church in Her Relatedness

The dimension of relatedness, referred to above, stands out clearly in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. However, this is not to be seen as a novelty in doctrine. The document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Commentary on the Document on the Church. Responses to Some Questions on the Doctrine on the Church* has this to say:

“Vatican II did not intend to change – and therefore has not changed – the previously held doctrine on the Church. It merely deepened this doctrine and articulated it in a more organic way. This is in fact what Paul VI said in his discourse promulgating the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, when he affirmed that the document had not changed traditional doctrine on the Church, but rather “that which was assumed is now explicit, that which was uncertain, is now clarified; that which was meditated upon, discussed and sometimes argued over, is now put together in one clear formulation”.²⁰ There is also a continuity between the doctrine

²⁰ Paul VI, *Discourse* (September 21, 1964): AAS, 56(1964), 1010.

taught by the Council and that of subsequent interventions of the Magisterium, which have taken up and deepened this same doctrine which itself constitutes a development".²¹

The self-same document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith further asserts: "Regarding the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium*, certain key ideas do seem to have entered into ecclesial consciousness: the idea of the People of God, the collegiality of the bishops as a re-evaluation of the ministry of bishop together with the primacy of the Pope, a renewed understanding of the Individual Churches within the Universal Church, the ecumenical application of the concepts of the Church and its openness to other religions; and finally the question of the specific nature of the Catholic Church which is expressed in the formula according to which the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church – of which the creed speaks – *subsistit in Ecclesia catholica*".²²

This change of emphasis is to be seen in a multiplicity of sectors and expressed in a variety of ways.

1. The Church - Holy AND Pilgrim

The articulation of *Lumen Gentium* is not primarily ideological. The physiognomy of the Church, illumined by imagery drawn from the Bible, is inserted dynamically in the history of salvation. The stress is strongly Christocentric;²³ however, to prevent a mistaken identification of the Church with Christ, the Church is also presented as the People of God in its biblical perspective, the Pilgrim Church, the Church of the Poor, and the Church of Sinners.²⁴

2. The Church Situated BOTH Vertically AND Horizontally

The entire Church is the People of God, not only the hierarchy; within this, there is a diversity of ministries. The theology of the Local

²¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Commentary on the Document on the Church. Responses to Some Questions on the Doctrine on the Church*, Response to the First Question.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 7.

²⁴ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 13 – 17.

Church finds its place here, but without anything that savours of diocesan isolationism.²⁵ In other words, what is envisaged is not only a "vertical unity", whereby all are united to the centre, but also horizontal bonds among Catholics.²⁶ Furthermore, the Church is the *sacramentum mundi*, the sign and instrument of unity of the world.²⁷

3. Immutability AND Change

Lumen Gentium presents an image of a Pilgrim People of God, whose life is subject to constant change; and whose identity is primarily rooted in fidelity to Christ and His message. The self-assurance of the Christian is based fundamentally on the identity of the faith. The creative balance of the post-Conciliar Christian is founded on a continuity which, at one and the same time, confronts the challenges of the present, is open to the future, and yet rooted in its origins with a fidelity which does not consist in the mere repetition of the past.²⁸

4. Unity AND Plurality

The Conciliar ecclesial understanding underscores both unity and plurality. Ecclesial unity is realized in pluriformity – the Catholic Church is a Communion of Individual Churches. It embodies a unity which does not destroy, but rather presupposes, a certain amount of pluriformity.²⁹

5. Primacy of the Pope AND Collegiality of the Bishops

Lumen Gentium re-evaluates the understanding of the ministry and collegiality of the bishops, while integrally safeguarding the primacy and infallibility of the Pope.³⁰

²⁵ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22 – 20.

²⁶ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

²⁷ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

²⁸ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 913.

²⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 13. The Conciliar Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* has this to say: "The holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit, by the same faith, the same sacraments and same government. They combine into different groups, which are held together by the hierarchy, and so form particular churches or rites. Between those churches there is such a wonderful bond of union that this variety in the Universal Church, so far from diminishing its unity, rather serves to emphasize it." (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 2).

³⁰ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter III.

6. *The Sacramental Nature of the Church*

The integration of the institutional and charismatic elements in the Conciliar ecclesiological paradigm points back to an underpinning notion of "sacramentality".

7. *A Diversity of Ministries AND Charisms*

The mystery of the Church involves a mutual communion of life among her members. *Lumen Gentium* affirms that Church Office and Charism are not in opposition. Every sort of differentiation between the faithful, based on the variety of their charisms, functions and ministries, is ordered to the service of the other members of the People of God. The Church is an organically-structured community which finds expression in the coordination of different charisms, ministries and services for the sake of attaining the common goal.³¹

8. *The Catholic Church and Other Christian Communities*

Belongingness to the People of God admits of differently nuanced gradations, without, in any way relativizing the character of plenitude which the Roman Catholic Church sees as realized in herself, expressed in the formula according to which the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church "*subsistit in ecclesia catholica*".³²

The phrase "*subsistit in*" is an attempt to harmonize two doctrinal affirmations: on the one hand, that despite all the divisions between Christians, the Church of Christ continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church; and on the other hand, that elements of sanctification and truth do exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church.³³

³¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11 – 12.

³² Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

³³ The Second Vatican Council used the phrase "*subsistit in*" in order to try to harmonize two doctrinal affirmations: on the one hand, that despite all the divisions between Christians the Church of Christ continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand that numerous elements of sanctification and truth do exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church whether in the Particular Churches or in the ecclesial Communities that are not fully in communion with the Catholic Church. In other words, although the Catholic Church has the fullness of the means of salvation, "nevertheless, the divisions among Christians prevent the Church from effecting the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her

9. The Catholic Church and Religions

In the Conciliar documents, there is a positive affirmation of the activity of the Holy Spirit within the religions and the cultures of persons of other faiths.³⁴ Nevertheless, this affirmation is not understood as a pluralism which grants parity of status to other religions, nor as an inclusiveness which affirms structures outside Christianity which are *per se* salvific.

10. The Dignity of the Human Person

Without impinging in any way on the uncompromising objective character of truth, the claim of the Catholic faith to the truth or the responsibility to move towards the truth, a new attitude is advocated, which takes into consideration the unassailable dignity of the human person.³⁵

11. The Church and the World

The Conciliar understanding of the Church-World relationship can be articulated as a new approach to the fundamental problem of the

children who, though joined to her by baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her". "It does not follow that the identification of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church no longer holds, nor that outside the Catholic Church there is a complete absence of ecclesial elements, a "churchless void". Contrary to many unfounded interpretations, therefore, the change from "*est*" to "*subsistit*" does not signify that the Catholic Church has ceased to regard herself as the one true Church of Christ. Rather it simply signifies a greater openness to the ecumenical desire to recognize truly ecclesial characteristics and dimensions in the Christian communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church, on account of the "*plura elementa sanctificationis et veritatis*" present in them. Consequently, although there is only one Church which "subsists" in one historical subject, there are true ecclesial realities which exist beyond its visible boundaries". See in this regard, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Responses to Some Questions regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church*, June 29, 2007, Response to the Third Question.

³⁴ See for instance, Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22: "For since Christ died for all and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery".

³⁵ Cf. Vatican II, Declaration, *Dignitatis Humanae*.

human person's dual relation to God and to the world, a search for a new balance between these two dimensions. The faithful, and particularly the laity, are in a special way the citizens of two worlds – totally committed as Christians to the realization of the mission of the Church – the Kingdom of God in its integrality, which includes the task of building a better world as committed members of the human community. The attitude to the world is not negative or polemical, but basically one of dialogical acceptance.³⁶

IV. From Dialectical Tensions to Creative Polarities

1. Shifts in Perspective

In *Lumen Gentium*, there is a shift in ecclesiological understanding:

- 1) From a primarily *Ideological Thrust* to a focus on *Church as Mystery*.³⁷
- 2) From an *Overly Divinization of the Church* to its *Sacramentalization*.³⁸

³⁶ Cf. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*.

³⁷ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its document: *Commentary on the Document on the Church: Responses to Some Questions regarding Certain Aspects of the 'Doctrine of the Church*, Response to the First Question has this to say: "In reality the profound intention of the Second Vatican Council was clearly to insert the discourse on the Church within and subordinate to the discourse on God, therefore proposing an ecclesiology which is truly theo-logical. The reception of the teaching of the Council has, however, often obscured this point relativizing it in favor of individual ecclesiological affirmation and often emphasizing specific words or phrases which encourage a partial and unbalanced understanding of this same conciliar doctrine".

³⁸ The adjective "sacramental" is derived from the noun "sacrament", which in its turn is the English equivalent of the Latin "*sacramentum*"; this is one of the ways in which the Greek word for "mystery" was rendered. Among the several senses in which "mystery" was used in the Bible, two are pertinent to our usage of this word: (1) the divine plan of salvation; (2) the obscure revelation of this plan. Cf. J. R. Quinn, "Sacraments, Theology of", *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 12, 806. The adjective "sacramental" is derived from the noun "sacrament", which in its turn is the English equivalent of the Latin "*sacramentum*"; this is one of the ways in which the Greek word for "mystery" was rendered. Among the several senses in which "mystery" was used in the Bible, two are pertinent to our usage of this

3) From an *Absolutist Understanding of the Church* to a primarily *Relational View of the Church*

4) From a *Clericalist, Juridicist and Triumphalist*³⁹ *Emphasis* to an ecclesial stress on *Communion, Sacramentality and Ministeriality*.

2. *The Pastoral Thrust of the Conciliar Ecclesiology*

As mentioned earlier, the documents of Vatican II cannot be seen as the explicitation of one specific philosophico-theological paradigm, but perhaps, it would be more apt to consider them as the diversified magisterial faith-response to the awareness of new pastoral *kairoi*. In that perspective, perhaps Vatican II can, in a sense, be called a “Council in Quest of a Theology”.⁴⁰

The adjective “pastoral” has, at times, been mistakenly contrasted to “doctrinal”. Pastoral Theology emerged from the need, not only for a systematic vision, but also for practical guidelines in realizing the mission of the Church. It trains its focus on the concrete situating of the Church’s activity with respect to a particular context at a given time. In other words, it treats of the principles that, as it were, guide the practical details of ecclesial action in mission.⁴¹ Consequently its thrust concerns neither the purely speculative field, nor on the other hand, the nitty-gritty of concrete pastoral praxis, but the sphere called: “speculative-practical.

word: (1) the divine plan of salvation; (2) the obscure revelation of this plan. Cf. J. R. Quinn, “Sacraments, Theology of”, *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 12, 806.

³⁹ The text of this intervention is found in *Acta Concilii Vatican II*, vol. 1, Part 4, 142-144.

⁴⁰ This in no way implies that the Conciliar texts are merely “pastoral directives”. To quote Gérard Philips: “It was, therefore now laid down in a declaration of the Theological Commission, solemnly approved by the Pope, that the Council, in questions of faith and morals, only “defined” what it explicitly stated to be defined, but that all other matters must be considered as constitutive elements of the doctrine of the supreme Magisterium of the Church. This means that they are a solemn exercise of the Magisterium, giving the highest possible guarantee of certainty short of an infallible declaration”. Gérard Philips, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: History of the Constitution”, H. Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Volume I, (London: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1966), 135.

⁴¹ Cf. Heinz Schuster, *art. Pastoral Theology*, in Karl Rahner, (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology. A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, (London 1975), 1178 – 1182;

In other words, Pastoral Theology involves not only an understanding of the "truths of the faith", but also the "flair" to realize the concrete implications of that same faith-understanding. Its thrust does not concern merely the purely dogmatic, nor, on the other hand, the nitty-gritty of concrete ecclesial praxis, but rather, the overarching sphere called "speculative-practical" (which embraces both the dimensions of truth and praxis).

3. *From Either/Or to Both/And*

The implications of *Lumen Gentium*, as far as its reception on the part of the Church is concerned, has, at times, tended to assume the contours of creative polarities. Given the *mysteric* and *relational* view of the Church, these polarities have often been expressed, not in terms of categorical statements which express a choice between two contrasting alternatives: *Either x Or* (*Aut x Aut*); but in the form of *Both this And that* (*Et x Et*); however, without anything that savours of either syncretism or relativism.⁴²

a) *The Polarity between the Immutable and the Historical*

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) presents us with the image of the Pilgrim People of God whose identity is primarily found in the fidelity to Jesus Christ and His message. The self-assurance of the post-Conciliar Christian is based fundamentally on the identity of the faith and not merely on the immutability of certain forms and practices of Christian life. The creative balance envisaged by the ecclesiology of Vatican II is founded on a continuity which, at one and the same time, confronts the challenges of the present, is open to the future, and yet rooted in its origins with fidelity.

b) *The Polarity between Unity and Plurality*

The unity of the Church according to the Pre-Conciliar model tended to be seen primarily in static terms, as a reality given once for all in the establishment of the Church by Jesus Christ. The dynamic aspect of this unity, as a dimension to be lived and realized anew by each succeeding

⁴² This dimension of Conciliar ecclesial renewal has been insightfully dealt with in J.J. Blomjous, *Priesthood in Crisis*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1969), 3 – 60.

generation, was not adequately highlighted. This eventually led at times to the *de facto* identification of unity with uniformity; or in other words, the practical identification of inner unity with external uniformity. Furthermore, the image of the unity of the Church was practically patterned after the model of human society. The Church was envisaged as a perfect society and described by analogies taken from political society.

The Conciliar understanding of the Church underscores the acceptance of both unity and plurality. Ecclesial unity is realized in pluriformity; it is a unity which does not destroy but rather presupposes a certain pluriformity.

c) The Polarity between the Charismatic and the Institutional

The coexistence and interpenetration of the institutional and charismatic elements in the post-Conciliar ecclesiological paradigm is understood in the notion of sacramentality which underpins the Conciliar understanding of the Church. Vatican II speaks of the Church as the People of God, which is surely a visible society, hierarchically organized, but whose first and inner principle of unity is the abiding presence of Jesus Christ and His Spirit.

d) The Polarity between the Church and the World

A perception of the relationship which exists between the Church and world is essential in order to situate the post-Conciliar emphasis of the Church's nature and mission.

This new emphasis has, among other things, been influenced by two factors:

- The growing secularization of human society, in the sense that the human community has increasingly begun to assume its responsibility regarding its own life and progress, with the result that the secular sphere and the relative autonomy of the secular are becoming more and more marked.

- Discarding the old postulate which seemed to consider the Church as living in a hostile world, the post Conciliar assumption views the Church and the world as partners involved in the dialogue of salvation which

continues through history. The Church, though not *of* the world, is *in* the world, *for* the world, and 'in a sense' *is* the world.

The Conciliar model of the Church-world relationship can be understood as a novel approach to the fundamental problem of the human person's dual relationship to God and to the world, a search for a new balance between the two. The Christian, and particularly the laity, are in a special way, 'citizens of two worlds' – totally committed as Christians to the realization of the mission of the church – the Kingdom of God in its integrality, which includes the task of building a better world as committed members of the human community.

This new consciousness of the Church being really in the world is productive of a type of Christian spirituality which has several new characteristics:

- A spirituality common to *all* Christians in its basic orientations, of which lay, sacerdotal, religious are all specifications.

- A spirituality of immersion in the world (not of flight from the world), which considers the world as the God-given environment for the normal development of the human person, but also for the growth in holiness of the Christian as such, having therefore as its characteristic, the integration of both personal and social factors influencing this human development into the specifically Christian life and spirituality.

- An ecclesial spirituality which enables the Christian to live not only his/her relationship in the human community, but also his/her membership in the Church, the People of God.

- A realistic spirituality, less preoccupied with 'feeling holy' and 'with visible signs and wonders' – not seeking the Cross only in 'special' moments or actions, but finding the Cross of Christ in the day-to-day task of confronting the realities of life.

V. Concluding Observations

The "reality" of Vatican II cannot be pinned down to the letter of the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents. These documents themselves, on their part, can neither be lumped together as a volume of purely doctrinal teaching, nor can they be (nor should they be) reduced to a

series of merely practical directives. Conciliar *aggiornamento* has involved, both the enlightened penetration into the spirit of the Council and the faithful application of its doctrines.⁴³ Furthermore, the *aggiornamento* advocated by Vatican II does not merely involve the acceptance of changes symbolized in the transition from *one static model* of ecclesial life to *another*, but, in a sense, a real education for a *certain ongoing acceptance of change* as a normal feature of the ecclesial life.

By way of conclusion, it can be said that in *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council has not only offered the Roman Catholic faithful, an *Authoritative and Renewed Doctrine on the Church*, but more integrally, challenged them with a *New Way of Being Church*.

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⁴³ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1966); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Vatican II: A Struggle of Minds*, (Dublin: Gill and Sons, 1963); Idem, *Vatican II: The Real Achievement*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1967).

Church and Churches in Vatican II

A Case for Rethinking

Kuncheria Pathil

In this article the author highlights the ecclesiology of Vatican II in the background of the historical developments in the Church. He outlines the ecclesiological status of the other Churches as expounded by the Council which grants only some or many elements of the One Church in other Churches, whereas the Catholic Church alone has the 'fullness' of ecclesial reality. The author calls for rethinking and reinterpretation of the ecclesial status of the other Churches. The author Kuncheria Pathil CMI is Professor Emeritus of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram Bangalore and its former President. At present he resides at Jeevadhara, Kottayam, and is the Director of its Research Centre, recognized by M.G. University.

I

A Historical Overview

I would like to begin this article by highlighting the origins of the Church, its historical development through the centuries and where we have arrived at today. Jesus preached the coming of the Kingdom of God. People were captivated by his teachings, deeds, miracles and message and many became his disciples. And from among his disciples he chose twelve as his 'Apostles'. The shattering experience of the tragic death of Jesus, the Messiah, and the totally new experience of the Resurrection and Pentecost made the disciples of Jesus into a closely knit community that proclaimed Jesus as "the Lord". This community of Jesus' disciples was known as the "Church", *ekklesia*,

the assembly of the People of God, and this community was marked by a great sense of mission. They communicated their faith-experience to their neighbours and to people in the neighbouring villages and towns, and thus "Christian" communities spread rapidly far and wide, first in the whole of Asia Minor, then in Rome, North Africa, Syria and even farther in to India. The term "Church" (ekklesia) was used first for the Christian community in Jerusalem¹ and later for the Christian communities in other places.² The term, therefore, originally meant the "Local Christian Assembly", gathered in houses in different localities for prayer, breaking of the bread and for witness as well as mission. Gradually the term *ekklesia* was used more abstractly for the whole body of Christians and their fellowship, consisted of different local Christian communities. The Church was thus originally the communion of all those 'local Churches', and not one centralized community, administered from one 'centre'.

The decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) was to endorse a healthy pluralism in the Church that there could be different types of local Churches, marked by a rich diversity in life-style, customs, worship, discipline, patterns of ministry and administrative and organizational set-up, but all united in the fundamental Christian faith. Thus the local Churches in the Apostolic and post-Apostolic period were not the carbon copies of the Jewish Church of Jerusalem, but were of different types conditioned by the society, culture, and religious ethos of the people.³ Local/Regional Churches had their legitimate autonomy within the fundamental unity of Christian faith, enshrined in the common Scriptures and the Apostolic Tradition. Whenever there arose

¹ Acts 8:3; 11:22; 12:1,5; 15:3.

² Acts 14:23; 15:41; 20:17, 28; 9:31.

³ See James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1977). The author identifies four different types of Churches in the New Testament, Jewish, Hellenistic/Gentile, Apocalyptic and Catholic. But all of them were united in the central Christological faith that Jesus is God and Saviour, 'fully God and fully Man', which was the touchstone and test of orthodoxy, however different may be the formulations of this confession. The moment this central Christological faith was challenged or diluted some of these types of Christian communities were condemned as heretical as in the case of the *Ebionites* (Jewish Christians who denied the full divinity of Christ and held an *Adoptionist Christology*) and the *Gnostics* (Hellenistic Christians who denied the full humanity of Christ and held a *Docetist Christology*).

problems and conflicts among the Churches in matters of faith and practice, leaders of the different Churches used to meet in “synods” and “councils” to clarify the faith and to take common decisions.

In the context of increasing heresies and schisms and of the urgent need for unity among the early Churches the post-Apostolic and Patristic periods saw certain homogeneous developments in the formation of ecclesial structures, a tendency for uniformity in doctrines and practices and movements for centralization both within and among the Churches. By the beginning of the second century we see certain standardization in the forms and patterns of the ordained ministry in all the Churches. The threefold ministry of Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons gradually became ‘normative’ in all the Churches. In the local Churches the power was gradually centred on the *episcopi*, who became the centre and guardian of the unity of the local Church and a pattern of monarchical episcopacy was established as witnessed in Cyprian of Carthage. With the conversion of Emperor Constantine, Christianity became the official religion of the whole empire. Political power was used to suppress all heresies and schisms, and uniformity in doctrines and practices was insisted upon by the imperial Councils of the 4th and 5th centuries also in view of the stability of the Empire. The Church in the Roman Empire gradually adopted the political and imperial model and its administrative divisions and patterns. Bishops became monarchs who began to rule the territorial units with jurisdiction or the power of governing. The emperors conferred on the bishops and the clergy privileges, honours and titles that differentiated them from the laity and thus widened the gulf between clergy and laity. Local Churches in the Roman Empire were clubbed together under Metropolitan Sees, and later under the five Patriarchates of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Constantinople. In the first millennium the Universal Church was thus governed by the *Pentarchy*, i.e. by the five Patriarchs who were all equals, though the Patriarch of Rome was recognized as ‘the first among the equals’. The communion among the Patriarchal Churches was expressed and maintained by the exchange of “synodal letters”, by mutual visits and intercommunion. The election of the Bishops had to be confirmed by the Patriarch, and that of the Patriarch by the other Patriarchs.

The total centralization of the Church under the supreme authority of the Roman Papacy that happened in the second millennium destroyed the rich diversity of the local Churches and their legitimate autonomy. Church of

Rome, as founded by Peter and Paul, was considered always as the centre and source of orthodoxy. From the third century onward we see that the special place and role of the Bishop of Rome in the communion of the Churches was increasingly acknowledged, though any exercise of universal jurisdiction in the strict sense of the Bishop of Rome, both in theory and practice, may be found only in the second millennium. With the Gregorian Reform of the 11th century, the Papal authority was formulated and implemented, and it was given legal basis with the codification of the Canon Law in the 12th century. The 13th century Scholastic theologians theologically consolidated this process of centralization by articulating a Papal-Monarchical-Pyramidal Ecclesiology. The centrifugal forces of the 16th century Reformation were checked by the Counter Reformation of the Council of Trent, which totally rejected the Protestant ideas and their demand for reforms. The democratic, secular, liberal and revolutionary movements of the 19th century were encountered by the First Vatican Council's dogmatic definitions of Papal Primacy and Infallibility, which was the culmination, a historical process of centralization of the Church.

This historical development of over-centralization of the Church had to pay its price. The rich diversity among the various Churches was suspected and at times condemned with the tragic consequence of division in the Church. The Christological debate among the theological schools of the 5th century and the insistence on uniformity in doctrinal and theological formulations led to the separation of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Undue interference of the Bishop of Rome into the affairs of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople and its allies caused the division between the Western Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox in the 11th century. Unwillingness to self-criticism and reform on the one hand, and hasty condemnation of the Reformers' ideas on the other, were the root causes of the division between Catholics and Protestants in Europe. The divisions among the Churches, the lack of communion and their subsequent life in separation, isolation and opposition, naturally led to certain fragmentation, distortion and exaggeration in all the Churches without exception. It was Vatican II which rediscovered the "ecclesiology of communion" and the plurality and legitimate autonomy of the Local Churches. The Council also affirmed to some extent the ecclesial reality of the other Churches, though the Council did not give the same ecclesiological status to all Churches.

II

Ecclesiology of Vatican II

The most significant contribution of the Council to the theology of the Church is perhaps the *rediscovery of the mystery of the Church*, a rediscovery of the Biblical and Patristic spirit, which never dared to “define” the Church. The medieval theologians, on the other hand, made the Church into a ‘perfect society’ and visible institution with clear-cut definitions, regulations, structures and boundaries that the mystery aspect of the Church was lost to a great extent. If we take seriously this mystery aspect of the Church, we cannot be so juridical and triumphalistic in defining the boundaries of the Church. The Council in fact acknowledged that the mystery of the Church transcends the Catholic Church and is present in the other Churches too, though all the Churches may not be faithful to the mystery of Christ in the same way. At the same time this divine mystery of the Church takes concrete shape in historical, socio-cultural and institutional realities. Therefore, we have to take seriously the external, historical, visible and institutional elements of the Church which have a sacramental character. The Council affirmed that the mystery of the Church in its ‘fullness’ exists only in the Catholic Church. This statement may be debated and in fact challenged by the other Churches.

A new understanding of the Church as “the people of God” is another major change made by Vatican II that highlighted the Church as a communion of people where all are equal having different gifts and roles. The mystery of the Church takes concrete form in a historical, human community. God’s plan of Salvation is the gathering together of humanity into one community or one family, a process initiated in the call of Israel to which a momentum and a new direction was given by Jesus Christ, and in the call of “a new People of God”. Gathering together a new people in the Church is not the end of the Salvation History. It is a means to the end, which is the gathering of all people in the “Kingdom of God”. In other words the Church as the people of God is a sign of the final unity of all humankind. All Christians exercise the prophetic, priestly and pastoral ministry of Christ and that of the Church and its basis is the gift of the Holy Spirit given to them as well as the different charisms of the Spirit. It challenges the authoritarianism of the hierarchy of the Church

who claims to be the exclusive channel of the working of the Spirit. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit is residing in the community of Christians as a whole and the community's 'sense of faith' (*sensus fidei*) is the real basis for the teaching authority of the Church.⁴ It is not a denial of the special role of the Apostles and their successors in the Church. They are first and foremost the spokespersons of the community, who speak authoritatively for the community and in the name of the community. Of course, they have the special charism of the Spirit for discernment and leadership, and they do play a sacramental role in making Christ's presence and action in the community.

In the pre-Vatican II period the emphasis was on the Universal Church and its unity and uniformity under the Papacy at the expense of the legitimate diversity of the Local Churches and their rightful autonomy. Vatican II made a shift of emphasis to the Local Churches, recognizing and endorsing their rich diversity and legitimate autonomy. As successors of the Apostles, the Bishops are not only co-responsible for all the Churches, but as "heads of the local Churches" they have their own authority in the local Churches as "vicars and ambassadors of Christ. As the successors of the Apostles,⁵ they are the principle of unity of the local Church, and no local Church can be under any other local Church, but to be in communion with all other local Churches. The Universal Church is fully present in the local Church; the local church is the microcosm of the whole church; it is the real Church in its original. Every local Church is the concrete manifestation and embodiment of the Universal Church and it is not merely a fraction or administrative unit of the Universal Church. The different local/individual Churches have their legitimate autonomy enjoying their own traditions, liturgies, disciplines, and their own theological and spiritual heritage.⁶ The unity among these diverse local churches is their "unity in faith and sacramental communion". They are "Catholic" by their communion with one another expressed in the communion of their bishops in the Episcopal College and with its head the Roman Pontiff.⁷

Another very significant change made by Vatican II is its teaching on Episcopal Collegiality by which the Catholic Church made a radical shift from its traditional papal monarchical system. This is once again a

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, No. 12

⁶ *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 14.

⁵ LG, nos. 20 - 21.

⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, Nos. 23, 26.

rediscovery of the synodal and conciliar structure and system of the early Churches, which was preserved faithfully by all the Eastern Churches. The ecumenical council of Nicaea (325 AD) had stipulated that Provincial Councils should be held twice a year and thus in the East the Synodal system became a constitutive part of the Church's life. But as the Papal Primacy was more and more asserted and the centralization of the Church took place from the beginning of the second millennium, the Provincial Synods and Councils became superfluous as they were totally controlled by Rome. As the Apostles functioned as a team or college, to which was entrusted the whole authority in the Church (not contrary to the authority of the whole community, but as spokespersons of the community as well as representatives of Christ) and as Peter was the head of this Apostolic College, so also the bishops today, as successors of the apostles, form one College, the Episcopal College, with pope as its head. This Episcopal College has the supreme, universal and immediate authority in the Church and it can teach and define matters of faith and morals with infallibility. Naturally this teaching has an apparent conflict with the papal primacy and infallibility as defined by the first Vatican Council. The teaching of Episcopal Collegiality and the restoration of the synodal and conciliar structures have brought the Catholic, Orthodox and other Eastern Churches closer to each other.

In the ecclesiology of Vatican II the community is prior to the hierarchy and ministers. Ministers are situated in the community in which they are performing certain functions. Ordained ministry is seen in the context of the ministry of the whole people of God. Every member of the community participates in the three-fold mission and ministry of Christ, as prophet, priest and shepherd.⁸ Ordained ministers do not have a monopoly of all ministries and they are not the exclusive channels of the spirit. Here the clerical view of the church gave way to an ecclesial view of ministry.⁹ In the new understanding of the Church, those who are in authority in the Church are not to rule others; they do not possess

⁸ LG, 11, 12, 13.

⁹ Bp. Cyprian of Carthage is a typical example of a clerical view of the Church. For Cyprian there is no Church outside the Bishop. The Bishop is primary and prior to the Church. Episcopate is the principle of the unity of the Church. " ...the Bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the Bishop; and if anyone be not with

any inherent, magical, ontological “power”, but they are called to serve the members of the Church. Ministries in the Church, whether ordained or not, are charisms and call to serve the community. Christ and His spirit reside in the Church, in the community. The sacramental character of ordained ministry clearly highlights its Christological, Pneumatological and ecclesial understanding and dismisses any inherent, ontological, magical power in the ordained minister. The triple ministry, prophetic, priestly and shepherding is integral parts of one and the same mission and ministry of Jesus. In the triple ministry the central role is *the proclamation of the Word of God* which is explicitly the prophetic or teaching function.¹⁰ The proclamation of the Word of God does not mean merely doctrinal teaching or communicating some ideas or catechesis. The Word of God transforms and recreates by the transforming and creative power of the Word of God. It does not mean that the priestly and shepherding (governing) functions are unimportant and secondary. These three functions are penetrating each other and become integrated into one mission. The same Word of God has also sanctifying and governing (gathering) function. The community is gathered, unified, sanctified and transformed by the power of the Word of God.¹¹ Proclamation of the Word of God leads to faith, which gathers, unifies, sanctifies and transforms the community. The primary role of the ordained minister in the Church is definitely the proclamation of the Word of God, and not a mere ‘cultic’ function. This new approach on ministry as prophetic with emphasis on the Word of God will certainly bring the Catholic and Protestant Churches closer in their search for unity.

III

Ecclesiological Status of the Other Churches in Vatican II

With Vatican II the Catholic Church has fully entered into a new relationship with the other Churches. Many documents and statements

the Bishop, that he is not in the Church..” (*Letter* 68). Of course, we can understand the view of Cyprian at a time when the unity of the Church was threatened under various schismatic and heretical Bishops. Cyprian appealed the people to stay with the legitimate Bishop in Apostolic succession.

¹⁰ LG 23; *Christus Dominus* 12; *Decree on Priestly Ministry* 4.

¹¹ LG, 25; *Christus Dominus* 11; *Decree on Priestly Ministry* 2, 4.

of the Council, especially, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, *Decree on Ecumenism* and the *Decree on the Eastern Churches*, are clear indications of a radical change in the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the other Churches. From polemics, triumphalism and condemnation, the Church entered into a new period of mutual understanding and acceptance. Council's Decree on Ecumenism stated:

The Catholic Church accepts them (the other Churches) with respect and fraternal affection. All those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church... all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honored by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers and sisters in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church.¹²

The Council went further and called the ancient Eastern Orthodox Churches as "Sister Churches" and the Reformation Churches as "Ecclesial Communities". In other words, the Vatican II accepted and endorsed the fact of the plurality of Churches:

While preserving unity in essentials, let all members of the Church, according to the office entrusted to each, preserve a proper freedom in the various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites, even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity be exercised. If the faithful are true to this course of action, they will be giving ever-richer expression to the authentic catholicity of the Church, and, at the same time, to her apostolicity.¹³

The Council's distinction between 'Sister Churches' and 'other ecclesial communities' may not be very obvious to everyone. In basic ecclesial structures the Orthodox Churches are very close to the Catholic Church, which considers itself as the ideal having the fullness of the visible sign and of the means of salvation. Hence the Orthodox Churches are called as "Sister Churches" which means that they are given almost

¹² *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 3; also *Ut Unum Sint*, no. 11.

¹³ UR, no. 4.

equal status. The Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church had to separate themselves in the year 1054 not due to the “filioque” question and other issues, but primarily due to political and socio-cultural factors and the conflict over Papal jurisdiction. The Council pointed out the apostolic origin of the Eastern Churches and acknowledged that the West had drawn in bounty from the spiritual treasury of the East for its liturgy, spiritual traditions and jurisprudence. Most important Trinitarian and Christological dogmas had been definitively taught by the ecumenical councils held in the East. In the doctrine of the sacraments, apostolic succession, ordained ministry and Eucharist, Orthodox and Catholic Churches are very close. Differences between them are only in the theological formulations or expressions of doctrines and they are complementary rather than conflicting.¹⁴ Hence Eastern and Western Churches were often characterized as “two lungs of the Church” and the Church is called to breathe with both lungs. In the light of this close relationship between the Catholic and the Eastern Churches, the Council also proposed mutual admission of their members to the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing of the sick when circumstances warrant and for their genuine spiritual benefit.¹⁵

Strictly speaking, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox Churches cannot be classified as one group¹⁶. However, the latter two groups may also be included in the broader category of ‘Eastern Churches’. The relationship of the Catholic Church to these three groups is more or less the same today. In 1994 a historic meeting took place in Rome between Patriarch

¹⁴ UR, no. 14-18; *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, Hereafter as OE, no. 2-11; *Ut Unum Sint*, no. 55-58.

¹⁵ OE, no. 27-29.

¹⁶ *The Assyrian Church of the East* was separated due to the so-called Nestorian controversy in the aftermath of the Council of Ephesus (431) and the *Oriental Orthodox group of Churches* (today six Churches – the Alexandrian or Egyptian Coptic Church, the Ethiopian Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Church) were separated on account of the Monophysite controversy and the definition of the Council of Chalcedon (451). See, Kuncheria Pathil, *Unity in Diversity: A Guide to Ecumenism*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2012, pp. 57 – 80.

Mar Dinkha IV of the Assyrian Church of the East and Pope John Paul II and they signed a common declaration on the Christological faith of the two Churches which had been the bone of contention since the 5th century. In that declaration both affirmed their common faith in the mystery of Christ, who is both divine and human and stated that 'the divisions brought about (in the past) were due in large part to misunderstandings'.¹⁷ The statement affirmed that both Catholics and Assyrians are "united today in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God". The Vienna Ecumenical Consultations (1971 – 1988) between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, organized by Cardinal Koenig of Vienna, approved the "Vienna Christological formula": "We believe that our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ is God the Son Incarnate; perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity. His divinity was not separated from his humanity for a single moment, not for the twinkling of an eye. His humanity is one with his divinity without commixtion, without confusion, without division, without separation. We in our common faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ regard his mystery inexhaustible and ineffable and for the human mind never fully comprehensible or expressible".¹⁸ This formula was later officially accepted in the Common Declarations signed by Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II on the one hand and Patriarch Shenouda III and Patriarch Yacob III the heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches on the other hand. In the Common Declaration between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Mar Yabob III of the Syrian Orthodox Church in 1971 they stated, "...there is no difference in the faith they profess concerning the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become really man, even if over the centuries difficulties have arisen out of the different theological expressions by which this faith was expressed".¹⁹

As already mentioned above, the Council did not grant the same status to the Reformation Churches and other ecclesial communities, as the Reformation caused a substantial break from the traditions of the Catholic Church and there are very serious differences between them

¹⁷ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 87 (1995), p. 686.

¹⁸ *Pro Oriente*, Booklet No. 1, 1990, p. 7.

¹⁹ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 65 (1973), pp. 299 – 301.

and the Catholic Church on the doctrines of the Church, sacraments, ordained ministry, interpretation of Scriptures, tradition, Episcopacy, Papacy and so on. But one has to keep in mind the background of the medieval scholastic theology and the structures and corrupted practices of the medieval Church in contrast to the biblical and patristic teachings for a correct understanding and right response to the Reformers teachings. But the council acknowledged that many significant "ecclesial elements" are present in those Christian communities, such as, the Word of God, life of grace, faith, hope and charity, some sacraments and so on.²⁰ Therefore, life of grace is available in these Churches and they are indeed also means of salvation to their members due to the salvific efficacy of Christ and His One Church.²¹ The Council also made a passionate call for removing the obstacles to the perfect ecclesial communion among all the Churches so that all Christians may be gathered into one visible body and fellowship with common celebration of the Eucharist.

On several occasions the Catholic Church publicly confessed the sins she committed against the unity of the Church. She acknowledged that she was equally responsible for the historical divisions in the Church. The Decree on Ecumenism asked pardon of God and the separated brethren for the sins of division: "St. John has testified: 'If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, his word is not in us' (1 Jn. 1:10). This holds good for sins against unity. Thus in humble prayer, we beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive those who trespass against us".²² "Among the sins which require a greater commitment to repentance and conversion should certainly be counted those which *have been detrimental to the unity willed by God for his People...* These sins of the past unfortunately still burden us and remain ever present temptations. It is necessary to make amends for them and earnestly to beseech Christ's forgiveness".²³

²⁰ UR, no. 3, 19; LG, no. 15; *Ut Unum Sint*, no. 64.

²¹ UR, no. 3.

²² UR, no. 7.

²³ Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 1994, no. 34.

The Council mentioned only in general on Eastern Churches and Protestant Churches that separated from the Catholic Church. The Anglican Churches cannot be classified under the Protestant Churches, as they share both the characteristics of Catholics and Protestants. There are also many Protestant Free Churches that originated in the post-Reformation period, such as, the Baptists, Methodists, Congregational Churches, Salvation Army, etc. The Mar Thoma Church of India and the United Churches such as, the Church of South India and the Church of North India are also important Churches. The mainline Pentecostal Churches and the Neo-Pentecostal Churches are also vigorously present today and flourishing more than any other Church. The Catholic Church today is seriously engaged in bi-lateral dialogues with all these groups of Churches, and a lot of progress has been made in mutual understanding and arrived at increasing consensus on several doctrinal issues in the ecumenical movement of the post-Conciliar period. This growth in the ecumenical movement today calls for rethinking and reinterpretation concerning the ecclesial status of the other Churches.

IV

Call for Rethinking and Reinterpretation

The views and approaches of Vatican II on the ecclesial status of the other Churches as such are not fully acceptable to the other Churches, though new ecumenical openings are whole-heartedly welcomed. Post-Vatican II developments in theology and the common growth of the Churches in the contemporary ecumenical movement call for rethinking and reinterpretation of the ecclesial status of the other Churches. The common faith and tradition of the undivided Church of the early centuries shall be the starting point in all re-thinking and reinterpretation. The awareness of the historical development of all Churches in faith formulations, liturgical practices, ecclesial and ministerial structures will assist the Churches to discern the changeable and unchangeable elements in the Church. No one historical Church can be the exclusive standard of orthodoxy for all other Churches. Changes and developments are inevitable, though no Church can totally undo history and the present ecclesial realities. Mutual understanding and acceptance with necessary renewal in view of the present ecclesial realities and the emerging signs

of the times are the main ecumenical keys. Moreover, the discernment of the power of the Spirit who unifies, integrates and renews the whole creation into the Kingdom of God gives spiritual strength to take risk on our common pilgrimage towards communion.

1. Unity and plurality of the Churches is attested in the New Testament.²⁴ It is also endorsed by Vatican II. Unity of the Church is a mystery; it is not a numerical unity or an administrative unity. Unity of the Church does not require any conformity in theology or in the articulation of doctrines or in the liturgical patterns or in the code of canons. It is similar to the mystery of the Trinity, One in Three. The 'One Church' exists in the 'Many Churches' and the 'Many Churches' exist in the 'One Church'. Of course, the Council says that the Church of Christ is one, holy, catholic and apostolic and this one Church "subsists" in the Catholic Church. Many commentators have pointed out that the first draft used the word "is" and it was later revised as "subsists" in order not to identify the Church of Christ exclusively with the Catholic Church. But in my opinion the Council's use of "subsists" does not adequately explain the unity and plurality of the Churches. In the light of our new experience with the other Churches and the growth in the ecumenical movement, we cannot give justice to the other Churches with the Council's teaching that "many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside her visible structure" (LG, no. 8). The mystery of the unity and plurality of the Church cannot be adequately presented by the philosophy of "substance" and "subsistence". The reality of the other Churches requires today rethinking and new interpretations of the Council's teachings, and we have to move ahead of the Council.

2. Catholic Church's active participation in the ecumenical movement in the post-Conciliar period since fifty years has changed the ecumenical scenario and the ecclesial realities today, which calls for rethinking and reinterpretation. Although the Catholic Church has not yet accepted membership in the World Council of Churches (WCC), it takes an active part in the programmes and meetings of the WCC. Besides sending delegations regularly to all the Assemblies and important sessions of the WCC, the 'Joint Working Group' between the WCC and

²⁴ See, the book of James D. G. Dunn mentioned above.

the Catholic Church conducts its regular meetings and promotes common study projects on several issues. The officially appointed theologians of the Catholic Church are members of the 'Faith and Order Commission' of the WCC and they do play a significant role in the discussions and in the drafting of important ecumenical consensus documents. Among them the ecumenical document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM Document or Lima Document, 1982), approved by the "Faith and Order" and the World Council of Churches, is a very promising statement of doctrinal convergence in the ecumenical movement. The document tried to articulate the common faith of all the Churches on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. It is a common proclamation of our faith of the One Church received from the apostolic times. On Baptism and Eucharist there emerged practically a full doctrinal convergence, but in theology and sacramental practice a healthy pluralism was endorsed. Ministry still remains to be a crucial issue. The document made a significant recommendation to all Churches to accept the threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons as an ecumenical pattern, which was, indeed, normative for all the Churches until the time of the Reformation. The doctrines of Apostolic Succession, sacramental nature of the Ordination, nature of the Episcopal ministry and Papacy are still to be clarified. The emerging doctrinal consensus and the proclamation of our common faith in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry have immense prospects in view of the mutual recognition of the Churches and the restoration of ecclesial communion.

The Catholic Church is equally involved in several Bi-lateral conversations with many Churches, the Vienna Ecumenical Consultations (1971-1988) organized by Cardinal Koenig of Vienna between Catholic Church and Oriental Orthodox Churches, Anglican-Roman Catholic Conversations since 1966, Lutheran-Roman Catholic Working Group since 1965, Lutheran-Reformed-Roman Catholic Conversations since 1966, Methodist-Roman Catholic Conversation since 1966, the Pentecostal-Roman Catholic Conversations since 1966 etc. These bilateral conversations were instrumental in sorting out the theological and doctrinal issues and in creating mutual understanding and a great extent of doctrinal consensus among the Churches. This tremendous growth in the ecumenical movement and in several Churches calls the Catholic Church to move beyond Vatican II and take concrete steps

towards mutual recognition and inter-communion among the main-line Churches.

3. The Catholic Church claims that it is the 'Mother Church', and indeed the Eastern Orthodox Churches are legitimate in making the same claim as the Church had its origin in Jerusalem and then moved first to Antioch and Alexandria. The Many Churches co-existed from the beginning of the New Testament and the real 'Catholic Church' is in fact a 'Communion of these Many Churches'. The Roman Church used to play in history a key role in maintaining unity and thus leading the communion. Therefore, today the Roman Catholic Church has a primary responsibility in discerning the 'One Church' in the 'Many Churches'. The One Church of Christ exists in the many Churches, even though the Churches may be defective in various degrees. How can we discern and discover the One Church in the many Churches? Could we speak of some distinguishing marks of the One Church of Christ? St. Augustine described the "marks" or "notes" of the true Church as "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic." Martin Luther identified three visible signs or marks of the true Church, namely, the possession of the Holy Word of God, the Holy Sacrament of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. Can we spell out today some signs or marks of the One Church in the many Churches along these lines? *Firstly*, since the beginning of the Church its most important distinguishing mark was 'faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior', 'fully divine and fully human'. Any Church which deviates from this central Christological faith cannot be considered 'Christian'. *Secondly*, all the Churches considered both the Old Testament and New Testament books in general as their precious and sacred heritage. Christian communities will be inspired and guided at all times by the sacred scriptures as they enshrine the original Christian experience, however different their interpretations may be. *Thirdly*, the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist by which almost all the Christian communities celebrate the memorial of Christ and thereby build up the community into the one 'Body of Christ', will remain always as a distinguishing mark of the Church. *Fourthly*, the continuation of the mission of the Church entrusted to it by Christ is what makes the Church true to itself. The Church lives by its mission and it becomes what it ought to be by its mission. Its mission is the proclamation and celebration of the Good

News of Salvation to the whole humanity. *Fifthly*, the mission and ministry are closely related. The mission of the Church is enhanced and continuously revitalized by a special ministry in the Church, which is a continuation of the apostolic ministry of the early Churches. This special ministry in the Church was exercised from the second century by the three-fold pattern of ministry - bishops, presbyters and deacons. This pattern indeed emerged in history. Would it be possible in principle to change this pattern? Should we insist on the Episcopal system of ministry as the only valid form? Should we still explain the "Apostolic Succession" as a mechanical and historical continuity in the Episcopal ordinations? Or, does Apostolicity primarily mean fidelity to Apostolic faith and Tradition? These are serious questions the Catholic and Orthodox traditions have to face today. *Sixthly*, could we speak of an "Ecumenical Papacy", which may today continue the biblical "Petrine Ministry" of being an instrument of communion, co-ordination, reconciliation and strengthening in the fellowship of the many Churches? Could this "Petrine Ministry" in the universal fellowship of the Churches be exercised by any leader from any Church, or should it be necessarily continued by the historical 'Roman Papacy'? These are some of the questions, which need further explorations.

What I am suggesting here is not a "reductionism" or "minimalism". The idea proposed is not to reduce the Churches to their least minimum or commonality at the expense of their individuality and uniqueness. I have only tried to identify some of the signs of the "One Church" of Christ in the "Many Churches" which are the concrete embodiments or unique individual realizations of the former. While emphasizing the unity and communion among the Churches, their diversity and uniqueness must be safeguarded and promoted at all costs so that the catholicity or wholeness of the Church may be discovered and enhanced.

4. In 1967 Pope Paul VI in his address to the Roman Secretariat for Christian Unity said: "The Papacy constitutes the greatest obstacle to reunion". This statement of the Pope seems to be accurate both historically and theologically. Papal interference in the affairs of the Eastern Churches and the Papal claim of 'universal jurisdiction' was the real cause for the separation of the Orthodox Churches in 1054. During the Reformation controversies too Papacy was the bone of contention.

Luther and the Reformers accused that Papacy usurped the supreme place of Christ in the Church. Indeed, in the Catholic view, the Bishop of Rome has a specific and unique role in the Communion of Churches. As the successor of Peter, the Pope is the 'visible sign of unity' and the bond of communion, 'the servant and instrument of unity'. According to the Catholic view, the communion with the See of Peter and his successors is necessary for the fullness of the unity of the visible Church. Although this view may be embarrassing to many Churches, it is significant that in the ecumenical movement there has been a positive development towards an 'ecumenical Papacy'. The Petrine ministry of unity, reconciliation and "strengthening the Brethren" seems to be more and more accepted today as essential to the unity of 'conciliar fellowship'. The Orthodox Churches had always given a prime place to the Bishop of Rome, a "Primacy of Honour", though they consistently rejected the "Universal Jurisdiction" as such of the Pope. In the recent bilateral dialogues the Anglicans and the Lutherans also spoke of a "Petrine function", "a Universal Primacy", "a renewed Papacy" or "a reconstituted Papacy" to preside over the Communion of Churches and to be an instrument of reconciliation and unity.²⁵

On the part of the Catholic Church also there are signs of a new style and functioning of Popes, who speak today practically for all Churches. Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II asked forgiveness to all Churches for the painful events of the past caused by the Papacy, and invited the other Churches and theologians to discuss the question of the ministry of the Pope to see how best it can serve the unity of the Church and to leave the past controversies behind.²⁶

5. The One Church will be a Fellowship or Communion of different Churches, united in the one common faith. But each church will be different and unique, *autocephalous* or self-governing and *autonomous* (with its own norms, structures, theology and traditions). It will be a

²⁵ See, Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (eds.), *Growth in Agreement*, Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversation at a World Level, Geneva: WCC, 1984, p. 108; also, P.C. Empie and T.A. Murphy (eds.), *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974.

²⁶ *Ut Unum Sint*, no. 95- 96.

“unity in diversity.” No Church will be under any other Church. No Church will be superior to others. No Church will dictate to other Churches. It will be a brotherly or sisterly communion. Members and ministers of any Church will be welcome in all Churches. They will have communion in the celebration of each other’s sacraments and worship. This was exactly the vision and practice of the early Churches.

It will be too naive to think that the early Church was a homogeneous group with a uniform organizational and administrative system headed by Peter or any other apostle. On the contrary, it was a fellowship of different local Churches characterized by enormous diversity in forms of organization and administration, in the pattern of worship, and in the articulation and formulation of faith and doctrines. This diversity flowed out spontaneously from their different historical, cultural, socio-economic, political and religious contexts

The Acts of the Apostles narrates very vividly the story of the struggles of these new missionary Churches (Hellenistic and Gentile Churches) to break away from Hebrew traditions of their mother Church in Jerusalem. The Jewish Church in Jerusalem, the Mother Church, was first unwilling to approve the emergence of the Hellenistic and Gentile Churches, which were quite different in their life-style and traditions. The Jewish Christians insisted that the new Gentile Christians should accept and practice the whole of “the Law and Prophets” including the rite of circumcision. This narrow view held by the Jewish Christians was challenged by the Hellenistic and Gentile Christians whom the Council of Jerusalem supported with the ruling that the Jewish law and traditions should not be imposed on the new Gentile Christians.²⁷ The first ecumenical council, thus, had a pluralistic approach to the ecclesial traditions. Its vision was not a Church with uniformity, but a communion of different Individual Churches.

Today we have to re-discover this original vision of the Church as a Communion of different types of Churches, united in the central Christological faith but different in the expressions and life-style of this faith determined by their own historical, cultural and social contexts.

²⁷ *Acts*, Chapter 15.

Our vision of One Reunited Church should be clearly in terms of a “Communion of Churches” or “Fellowship of Churches” or a “Conciliar Fellowship”, where all Churches must recognize each other as equals. This communion shall be grounded in the common faith and in the communion of the sacraments. Such a communion must be maintained, supported and fostered in a conciliar relationship among the Churches. All the Churches must be able to sit together as equals in an Ecumenical Council, which could be a visible sign of our ecclesial communion.²⁸

The realization of this vision requires a conversion and renewal on the part of all the Churches. Divisions among the Churches and their isolated existence for centuries have, in fact, caused some fragmentation among all the Churches, though in different proportions. So there is need for healing and the rediscovery of wholeness for all the Churches without any exception. It calls for theological and doctrinal dialogue among the Churches, common reflection, common action and common prayer as well as worship. The healing of our wounds and the re-discovery of our wholeness or catholicity needs time, hard work from our part and God’s blessings. We cannot fabricate Church unity in a day or two. It is in our hopelessness and helplessness that God utters to us His healing and powerful Word, which alone could unite and save us.

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²⁸ The vision of unity as “Conciliar Fellowship” was developed in the Ecumenical Movement by the “Faith and Order Movement” and was finally approved by the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC in 1975 (*Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975*, edited by David M. Paton, London: SPCK, 1976, pp.59-61); The Vision of Unity of Vatican II is also in the same direction of “a brotherly communion of faith and sacramental life” (*Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 14).

Kingdom of God, Church and World

A Vatican II Perspective

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Introduction

The *aggiornamento* intended by Pope John XXIII when he called the Second Vatican Council implied change, freshness, a new way of being Church. The council was to enable the message of the Christ event preserved in the Christian Tradition to express its saving meaning and transformative force in the world of the twentieth century. Such an expression would require not only a hermeneutics of continuity with the past but also a hermeneutics of discontinuity so that the Christ event could be effective in the present. Mere continuity of the past would make for ineffectual repetition; newness without regard for the authentic Christian Tradition would argue rupture in that tradition.

One way of approaching Vatican II is to examine the present self-understanding of the Church and compare with its pre-Vatican II

understanding. The Vatican II understanding of the Church underlined the sense of inclusiveness which was reflected in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, both dealing with the Church in relation to the 'other'. Understanding implies interpretation and the charge is sometimes made that many of the interpretations of the documents of Vatican II which gained acceptance in the council's aftermath suggest a rupture rather than continuity with the Christian Tradition. Is there evidence to confirm the validity of the charge?

This essay begins by examining three significant terms that are drawn from the Christian Tradition: Kingdom of God, Church, and World. These terms featured in the council's discussions and appeared in the documents of Vatican II, especially LG and GS. It will be seen that these terms are related one to the other, and at the same time, raise theological questions. In the first part of the paper, brief comments will be made on each of the terms. Next their interrelatedness in both the documents will be considered as well as their influence on the self-understanding of the Church today.

Kingdom of God, Church and World as Theologically Significant Terms

In the Christian Tradition, the theological meaningfulness of each of these terms develops and influences the self-understanding of the Church. At the start, the terms are considered as they are found in scripture.

1) Kingdom of God

Even though the New Testament affirms the Kingdom of God as proclaimed in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, its presence and realization in the world retain a sense of mystery.

The pedagogy of the gospels is constituted in great part by the progressive revelation of the mysteries of the kingdom, notably in the parables. After the resurrection, this pedagogy will be completed (Acts 1/3), and action of the Holy Spirit will terminate it (cf Jn 14/26; 16/13ff).¹

¹ Xavier Leon-Dufour (editor): *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, second edition, revised and enlarged, New York, 1977, p 294.

The kingdom that Jesus preached had little in common with those over which earthly kings reigned. It meant the righteousness of God taking shape in the world of humankind and the covenantal relationship between God and his people guiding human destiny. The apostolic preaching centred on Jesus Christ in whom the Kingdom of God was present (Acts 8/12; 19/8). All men and women, not merely the Jewish people, are invited to be part of its reality (Matt 13/31ff) and persons would be judged on the basis of charity done to their neighbour (Matt 25/31-46).² In the scriptures, the Kingdom of God will come about by the power of God. It is seen in persons internally; it has external visibility as when it brings justice and peace; it is also announced as a future event.

2) Church

Deriving from the *ecclesia* used in Matthew 16/18, it connotes people called together (an assembly) by God. In the *Septuagint* the word is more properly used to refer to an assembly that comes together for worship (1 Kings 8). In Acts, it is seen as a believing community called to announce the Good News to all peoples; as followers of Jesus, they are "devoted to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2/42) Within a faith perspective, the Church is recognized as "the mystery of God's will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph 1/9) In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul sees his community as called to be a unified body in the Spirit: "We are all baptized in one Spirit to form one Body" (1 Cor 12/13).

Historically, one observes how the early centuries gave space to various forms of church. In time, and through accidents of history, the notion of the Church as a monolithic whole gained ascendance with its

² Karl Rahner & Herbert Vorgrimler: *Theological Dictionary* edited by Cornelius Ernst and translated by Richard Strachan, 3rd impression, New York, 1968, p 251: "This kingdom of God is not identifiable either with a State—which must always be provisional—or even with the Church of this age, which is the society of those who believe in the kingdom of God to be which will terminate the history of the world. The Church is the primordial sacrament of this kingdom and, because she is Holy Church, its secret beginning, precisely when she recognizes in her own weakness the manner in which God's redemptive might will come."

creeds, its laws and customs, prescribed forms of worship and specific dogmas and doctrines. In Vatican II the Church is seen as inaugurated by the Son, and willed by the Father, to bring about humankind's redemption in Jesus Christ.

3) *World*

In Genesis 1/1, the world is depicted as "the heavens and the earth". The biblical conception of the world is situated in salvation history: "...as a creature of God the world has meaning only through its function in the plan of salvation, and it is in the framework of this plan also that the world finds its final destiny."³ In giving humankind the task of taking charge over the earth (Gen 1/28), the world becomes involved in human fulfilment. In the New Testament, the world is seen as an object of God's love: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son" (John 3/16) to redeem it. Yet, it is in an evil world that redemption takes place so that Jesus is seen as renewing the world (John 1/29,). A new heaven and earth that is spoken of in the Book of Revelation (21/1) had been foretold by Isaiah (65/17; 66/22).

Today, the world is not seen as a static or inanimate object in nature. It refers to the different peoples who form the family of humankind and the values lived out by them. It is often contrasted with those who are baptized in the Church. Often it is depicted as an obstacle to the realization of the Kingdom of God among humankind.

Salient Aspects of *Lumen Gentium*

Vatican Council II's main focus was on what it means to be Church. In contrast to *GS* which considered the Church in its outreach and service to the world of men and women, *LG* dealt with the Church as the community of the baptized and its functioning.

1) *Church as Sacrament*

As sacrament (1, 48) the Church signifies God's activity in the world as a whole and by doing so affirms that the world is being redeemed even though the completion is still to come. The mission of the Church should be seen not so much as making God present where he was not,

³ Xavier Leon-Dufour, p 677.

but as bringing to greater visibility the inchoate presence of God in the world. Such a task would call for a concrete recognition of the places in which the inchoate presence of God is found. The multitude of religions other than Christianity would surely qualify as contexts for this presence. Such an understanding is admittedly an optimistic view of religions in general but it better accords with the Church's self-understanding as sacrament.

It is good to recall that the Church always accepted the efficacy of the *votum* along with baptism of water. Both forms were seen as indicative of historically visible salvation in a person. It is against this background that one can appreciate the statement in LG 16 concerning the salvation of those who are not baptized members in the Church. The statement should be seen as not merely a point of arrival but as a point of departure for interreligious collaboration and activity. In the multi-religious context of India, such a point of departure would augur well for amity and goodwill and the building up of a humane community.

2) *People of God*

Even before one can be baptized a Christian, a person is called by God to be one of his people. That is why the term People of God gained great importance. The inclusive plan of God is reflected in the term People of God:

All men are called to belong to the new People of God. This People therefore, whilst remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God's will may be fulfilled; he made human nature one in the beginning and has decreed that all his children who were scattered should be finally gathered together as one (cf Jn 11/52). (LG 13)

Here, one keeps in mind that Vatican II intended to nuance an understanding of Church membership that arose after Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943).⁴ Hence the following: "This Church,

⁴ Refer Karl Rahner: *Theological Investigations*, Volume II, *Man in the Church*, "Membership of the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII's encyclical '*Mystici Corporis Christi*,' Translated by Karl-H Kruger, Baltimore, 1966, pp 1-88.

constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by bishops in communion with him.” (LG 8) Space was provided for other Churches or ecclesial communities. On August 6, 2000 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (DI) stating that only those bodies can be termed ecclesial communities which have “preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery...” (17)⁵

The statement of DI seems overly juridical. Could one not envisage a body of persons professing Jesus Christ and evidencing to that fact in their way of life as seen by others? Would not such a body be in truth a sacrament of God’s presence in the world even without the provisions mentioned by DI? However, the tenor of GS—which will be examined a little later—would appear to consider such bodies as churches.

3) *Hierarchy and Laity*

LG 32 speaks about “a common dignity” and “a true equality” among the members of the Church while acknowledging that there are different vocations (teachers, dispensers of the mysteries, pastors for others). LG 33 clearly states: “Through baptism and Confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself”. In the document *Apostolicam actuositatem*, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, the lay faithful are told that “the Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well” (2). Yet in the present set up of the Church, the lay faithful exercise no decision-making power in the functioning of the apostolate of the Church.

LG asks all the baptized to help in the mission of the Church but it continues to invest the hierarchy with absolute decision-making power. For that matter, even the theologian has little chance of presenting and arguing his case. In the Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian (Rome, 1990), no rights are recognized as far as the theologian is concerned and the hierarchical church has no duty which obliges it in regard to the theologian!

⁵ “Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, Vatican City, 2000.

4) *The College of Bishops*

The College of Bishops surely offers the right setting for exercising the juridical function of the papacy. LG 22 points out that this was modelled on the pattern of the apostolic college and made for unity and communion in the early Church. In keeping with the teaching of the doctrine concerning the College of Bishops, a person consecrated a bishop is first inducted into the *collegium* before he can be given charge of a diocese. Such teaching makes all the bishops responsible for the common good of the universal Church and this is a progressive step.

On the other hand, if the pope (the bishop of Rome) has immediate and universal jurisdiction over all the baptized, he need not consult or even listen to others (including bishops) in making decisions for the universal or local church. This is defined in the document *Pastor Aeternus* (1870). In keeping with the teaching of this document, LG 22 says:

(For) the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, namely, and as pastor of the entire Church, has full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.⁶

However, some legislative action is called for if the pope has to make well-informed decisions and be accountable for his actions.

Salient Aspects of *Gaudium et Spes*

GS, the longest and last document of Vatican II, emerged from the deliberations that took place in the council itself; it was not envisaged at the start of the council. It can be said that the document was born from the lived experience of the council fathers and hence has a special importance.

GS was able to address all peoples in the world, because the participants in the council could appreciate the experience of secular society and were inspired by men and women as they lived their lives from day to day:

⁶ Pope Francis who was elected in March 2013 to be pope has made it known that he will have 8 consulters from among the cardinals who will advise him. Their first meeting will be in October 2013 even though he will be in touch with them individually.

The Council registered its awareness of the world in at least four ways, none of them developed by any previous council. First, the Council in general evaluated the “world” positively and with some optimism. Second, this positive attitude towards the world is explained by the Council’s desire to see the Church be of spiritual service to the world and even to help it to its temporal fulfilment; the church wanted to make itself an effective presence in secular society for the upbuilding of the city of man as well as for the upbuilding of the city of God. Third, the Council was aware that the Church is profoundly affected by the cultures in which it finds itself. Fourth, the Council appropriated John XXIII’s judgment that human society was “on the edge of a new era”; the Council wanted the Church to prepare itself to be a vitally formative influence in the “new era”.⁷

GS emerged out of a theology that viewed the other—not merely the baptized individual—as also favoured by God. According to LG, chapter two, all persons are called to be the People of God even though the Catholic and Christian may have already celebrated their call through water baptism. It is this insight of all persons being favoured by God that was expressed in LG 16. The same theology led the council to affirm in NA 2 that the Church rejected nothing that was true and holy in other religions and that these “often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.” This observation of NA should be seen not so much as a point of arrival in theological thinking but as a point of departure that is becoming conscious of the implications of the affirmation.

GS begins with a preface and introduction where the self-understanding of the Church is articulated in terms of its function in the world, and the need to respond to the anxieties and questions arising in the different contexts of persons and communities. The body of GS first deals with theological underpinnings of a comprehensive anthropology (The Church and Man’s Vocation) and then with some challenging themes (Some more Urgent Problems) some of which have been treated in papal encyclicals.⁸

⁷ John W. O’Malley: *Tradition and Transition*, Historical Perspectives on Vatican II, Wilmington, 1989, pp. 46–47.

⁸ Refer “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” by J. Bryan

1) *Salvation outside the Church*

In the complexity of today's evolving world, importance is given to human experience. Further, GS is decidedly positive in viewing the world as the arena where God's transforming action takes place and offers the service of the Church in facing challenges. Referring to the Church, Bishop Christopher Butler asserts the following:

The Church's life does not flow down from the Pope through bishops and clergy to a passive laity; it springs up from the grass-roots of the People of God, and the function of authority is co-ordination, authentication and, in exceptional cases, control.⁹

Since the People of God includes all who are called by God to be his people, the theologian is invited to look for and recognize what God has already done among peoples belonging to faith persuasions other than Christian, in their cultures and religions. This positive attitude suggests changes in the way the Church's mission is conceived and projected, and consequently in the way we theologise: "...from a classicist to a historically conscious world-view; from a deductive to an inductive methodology; from an apologetic to a foundational teaching style."¹⁰

In the past, mission theology was patterned on the donor model with the presumption that God's revelation in Jesus Christ had to be given to those who lacked it. The motivation from this model was in great part responsible for the voyages of Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) as also the missionary journeys of Francis Xavier (1506-52). GS shows awareness of the value of the secular and reveals more than a merely well-founded suspicion that God has acted among peoples other than Christian and that other religions mediate God experience. The recognition of God acting among others should be the presupposition that shapes our outreach to those of other faith persuasions. Such recognition is also the basis for envisaging the contours of a 'world-church'.

Hehir in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (Richard P. McBrien, general editor), New York, 1995, pp 963-4.

⁹ *The Theology of Vatican II*, The Sarum Lectures 1966, London, 1967, p 76.

¹⁰ Maureen Sullivan: *The Road to Vatican II*, Key Changes in Theology, New York/Mahwah, 2007, p 42.

The aspect of inclusiveness has slowly begun to percolate down to the third-world countries and Christianity from the west recognized that if true Christian communion had to materialize, responsibility had to be shouldered by third-world Christians. Karl Rahner had the following to say:

In *Gaudium et Spes*, in an act of the whole Church as such, the Church as a whole became expressly aware of its responsibility for the future history of mankind. Although in detail it is largely the expression of a European mentality, the fact remains that this Constitution reveals the presence of the Third World as part of the Church and as the object of the latter's responsibility. Although it is only with great difficulty and terribly slowly that European churchgoers are becoming aware of the Church's world-responsibility, this responsibility, political theology, can no longer be excluded from the consciousness of a world-Church.¹¹

2) *Interreligious Dialogue as the Way to Approach Others*

In today's world there are institutions that champion the cause of order, peace and unity. However, there is also much misunderstanding, prejudice and intolerance that cause deadly violence and destruction in the name of religion or more precisely religious fundamentalism. It is against this background that interreligious dialogue assumes an importance and offers a basis on which peoples of different religious affiliations can come together and collaborate to build a world of justice, peace, love and fellowship.

The word 'dialogue' as understood in *Gaudium et Spes* is relatively new in Christian theology. From the Catholic Church's point of view, Vatican II signalled seriousness in undertaking interreligious dialogue with all peoples in the world:

...the Church shows itself as a sign of the spirit of brotherhood which renders possible sincere dialogue and strengthens it.

...it is our hope that frank dialogue will spur us all on to receive the impulses of the Spirit with fidelity and act upon them with alacrity.

¹¹ Karl Rahner: *Concern for the Church*, Theological Investigations XX, translated by Edward Quinn, New York, 1981, p. 81.

For our part, our eagerness for such dialogue, conducted with appropriate discretion and leading to truth by way of love alone, excludes nobody; we would like to include those who respect outstanding human values without realizing who the author of those values is, as well as those who oppose the Church and persecute it in various ways. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 92)

If in the past, discussion or debate had meant the exchange and scrutiny of ideas, arguments and concepts, today dialogue includes awareness of oneself and the other in all the dimensions of being. Dialogue presupposes inter-connectedness between persons and the world in which they are situated. With this realization a person does not seek merely to 'know' but to 'understand' and 'feel with' another. Those engaging in dialogue see themselves as partners who together quest for the truth with respect for each other's positions and are willing to be persuaded by the truth as it occurs. Each of the partners enters the dialogue with his or her convictions of faith as foundational to the quest for the truth. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference sees three types of dialogue as suitable in the Asian context: of life, of action, of discourse.¹² Human development is not restricted to an individual's material well-being alone but also to the sphere of the spiritual, psychic, emotional, intellectual and social. Such comprehensive well-being constitutes the process of humanizing and being humanized so that a person becomes more truly him/herself through a process. In this process, the presence of another person whatever is his/her faith persuasion is a help for enrichment at all levels of being. Further, an honest sharing of one's Christian faith is not excluded. In Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* (55) interreligious dialogue "as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment...is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*." (55)

GS 92 begins by seeing the Church as an agent that encourages, cultivates and promotes dialogue so that a unity in brotherhood may be achieved. The council fathers see the task of dialogue as the work of the Spirit.

¹² Errol D'Lima: "Being Church in India is Being in Dialogue", in Thomas D'Sa (editor): *The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium*, Bangalore, 2005, pp 601-616.

3) *The Church's Mission:*

To build Humane, Interreligious Communities

One could enter the Church through a conviction of faith in Jesus Christ that translates into baptism. Should this be *the* only goal of the Church's mission to the exclusion of all others? Proclaiming the Kingdom of God was the main goal of Jesus and this continues to be the mission of the present-day Church. If the end result of such proclamation is the creation of a more humane society which includes a community wherein justice, love and fellowship prevail, could it not be the legitimate and justifiable mission of today's Church? In the light of the second part of GS, such a goal seems appropriate and theologically acceptable. (GS 22) Such a goal will not increase church membership but will contribute to a more humane society where justice, peace, equality and human dignity are experienced more widely.

Church Establishment tends to remain static in its views concerning theologizing. Many of the recent magisterial documents do little more than affirm past practice and understanding. Often change tends to be equated with relativism whereas change is the condition for healthy growth:

Traditionalists are sometimes afraid that if they let something new 'go too far', their own position will be threatened. But that exposes a false premise, as if 'their own position' were an end in itself to be guarded like a hidden treasure. The only 'position' worthy of the church as institution is one that fosters openings for dialogue with the world and the proclamation of God's salvation to all the world.¹³

Here, an enhanced quality of life need not be marked by the receiving of water baptism, provided that a person's right to receive baptism is always honoured.

4) *Religious Pluralism in our World*

Pluralism does not necessarily imply relativism. It actively engages the 'other' as one who has had a valid God experience different from one's own. It is not an excuse for religious indifferentism, nor is it a settling down for the lowest common denominator as far as human values are concerned. Authentic pluralism consists in examining another's way

¹³ Walbert Buhlmann: *The Church of the Future, A Model for the Year 2001*, New York, 1986, 175.

of life to see if it reflects gospel values. Pluralism does not begin with doctrine but with life. It also affirms “otherness” as a manifestation of God’s mystery in creation and avoids setting up categories—which are manmade—to authenticate God’s action in the world. It requires a hermeneutics that looks to recognize the mystery of God in the different contexts of human experience: “Christians ought to be convinced that the achievements of the human race are a sign of God’s greatness and the fulfilment of his mysterious design.” (GS 34)

It is difficult to sustain (*pace Dominus Iesus* 4) the claim that from God’s point of view, the existence of many religions in the world is a *de facto* situation but not *de iure*. Even more difficult is it to declare that except for the Christian religion where God has sought to reveal himself to believers, the other religions are to be considered well-intentioned but no more than powerless human efforts to encounter the divine. It would seem that such questionable claims were maintained to lend urgency to the mission enterprise of the Church during the colonizing days of imperialist nations? Should such a legacy be continued?

Summing up

The Catholic Church will fulfil its authentic function by being not only Christian but interreligious. Collaboration not competition will enable it to respond to human needs and anxieties. In general, dialogue rather than dictates should characterize the life of the Church. When the new pope Francis affirms that he is the bishop of Rome, he is announcing a foundational truth that had been taken for granted. The basic intuition of collegiality is that the pope emerges from the college of bishops. The bishops in the world represent the different contexts where the Church has to carry out its salvific mission. Their task is to see that each of the different Individual or local Churches proclaims a message of hope and fulfilment to humankind everywhere.

The Church universal is made up of Communion of Churches. Contextualized Churches witness to the mysterious and universal manifestation of God present in the world of the secular and bring to greater visibility the varied yet authentic expressions of the one proclamation of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all.

Introducing the Science of Hermeneutics

Vincent Kundukulam

This article may be read as prologue or epilogue to this number of *Jeevadhara* which discusses the question of hermeneutics of Vatican II. The author introduces the science or discipline of hermeneutics which deals with the process of understanding and interpreting the text and the events in order to explore its manifold meanings. After clarifying the term, its historical trajectory is highlighted starting from the Greek philosophers into our own time of post-modernity. A text has different layers of meanings and there is no one final meaning, but new meanings will always emerge and evolve in the historical and cultural process of interpretation. The author, Dr. Vincent Kundukulam is at present the President of Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Alwaye. He has Doctorates both from Sorbonne University Paris and Catholic Institute, Paris. He is a regular contributor to *Jeevadhara* and is one of its editors.

Acquiring knowledge is essential for life. But accumulating any sort of data is of no use. Only right details will give right direction in research and life. Unfortunately there exists no information that is naïve. It seems that, to know the truth, one must know the facts behind the discourse. In other words we cannot take for granted the meaning of a text or an event. There are so many presuppositions behind the curtain and they are to be explored in order to apprehend rather an objective and reliable account of the whole story. Hermeneutics is that branch of science which looks into the process of understanding and interpreting the text and the events.

In recent times, it has become a very popular field of study. Not only exegetes, theologians and philosophers but also philologists, historians, sociologists, literary critics, and the like experts of various branches of knowledge show keen interest in it. As a result, it has also become a complex discipline. While seeking to clarify things, it often gets trapped in a labyrinth, from which one cannot easily find a way out. In a short essay like this, we are unable to discuss all the complicated issues involved in the process of learning and interpretation. Our goal is only to make a seminal presentation of the science of hermeneutics: its definition, history, trends, assumptions and challenges which would serve as an epilogue to this discussion on the hermeneutics of Second Vatican Council.

1. Definition

The word hermeneutics comes from the Greek word *hermeneuein* which means inclusively to express, to explain, to translate and to interpret. The root is apparently derived from the divine name Hermes, the messenger of the gods who makes intelligible to human beings that which otherwise cannot be grasped. The Greeks associated Hermes with the discovery of language and writing, the indispensable tools of understanding.¹

In the Christian circles hermeneutics has been often associated with the biblical study where it is referred to the methods of exegesis, i.e. arriving at the original intention of a biblical writer. There is definitely affinity between exegesis and hermeneutics but the latter is not restricted to biblical investigations alone. In fundamental theology hermeneutical science touches upon various issues such as art of understanding, the history of truth, the role of the subject in interpretation, the different functions of language, the relationship between the philosophies and ideologies, etc. It focuses on a network of topics including understanding, explanation, analysis, meaning, meaningfulness, interpretation, experience, textuality, appropriation, language and historicity. In this sense hermeneutics is seen as responsible for the cognitive, ontological, historical and linguistic problems involved in the entire field of systematic theology.²

¹ A. Richardon and John Bowden, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1985, p. 250.

² P. Grech, Hermeneutics, in: *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella, New York: Crossroad, 1994, p. 416.

Hermeneutical studies take two main directions: one concerned with the methods and conditions of valid interpretations and the other concerned with understanding as the fundamental way of human being. The first drift deals with the issues like clarification of an author's intent, methods of linguistic, compositional and symbolic analysis, specification of procedural criteria and clarification of the conditions for understanding. The second movement engages in the discussions of historicity, the role of imagination, dialogue as a model of textual interaction, the relation of truth to textuality and the like which bring reflective awareness regarding the conditions for and possibilities of understanding.³

2. Old Trajectory⁴

Hermeneutics as such is by no means a new problem. It is neither Christianity nor modern philosophers who invented it, though their contributions are non-negligible in its development. Already in the Greek antiquity the question of hermeneutics was posed in order to ascertain the meaning of the myths in general and the poetical works like Homeric writings in particular. Plato spoke of a 'meaning below' the surface of the text and many of the first century writers described it as allegory. Aristotle's efforts consisted firstly in mastering the techniques of language i.e. the grasp of literal meaning of the text, and secondly in attaining a profound and interpretative meaning of the text. Already at this stage the inevitable problem in hermeneutics was the bifurcation of a text from its significance, i.e. distinguishing the sense of the text from the tradition in which it is formulated.

Judaism met with the need of hermeneutics as it had to give meaning to the Law and rule the Israelites in a variety of situations. This was provided by the two forms of *midrash*: *halacha* explaining Law from juridical aspect and *haggadah* offering interpretation through edifying stories and thoughts. Jesus as a rabbinical commentator, gave new

³ J. McCarthy, *Hermeneutics, A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, D.W. Musser and J.L. Prince (eds.), Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992, p. 219.

⁴ Rene Marle, *Introduction to Hermeneutics*, London: Burns & Oates/Herder and Herder, 1967, pp. 12-21; A.C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, in: *New Dictionary of Theology*, S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright (eds.), England: Intervarsity Press, 1988, p. 294.

meanings to the OT passages and he did it by showing how the prophecies regarding God's reign were fulfilled in Him. One of the most significant instances is Lk 24: 27 where Jesus interprets to the disciples at Emmaus the texts beginning from Moses and from all the prophets concerning him.

In the Christian world the first major consideration of hermeneutics is seen in the controversial exchanges between the schools of Alexandria and Antioch. Origen argued that the interpreter should begin with the plain grammatical meaning but should then rise from the literal to the spiritual. He saw the outward grammar of a text as the human body. What gave it soul was moral application and what gave it spirit was the frame of reference informed by the spiritual perception. On the other hand, the Antiochene School especially fathers like Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) and John Chrysostom (344-407) gave priority to the linguistic consideration. Similar tension existed also in the West between St. Jerome who was proponent of a literal school and St. Ambrose and St. Hilary, representatives of the spiritual school. St. Augustine united in his writings the preoccupations of both the literal and interpretative meanings of the text and thus established the foundations for a fruitful hermeneutics. Augustine's theory of *signum* and *res* is a clear evidence for this unique blend.

During the time of Reformation, hermeneutics came to the forefront with the principle *sola Scriptura*. Luther rejected the interpretation of faith outside of Scripture because for him the Scriptural text itself could render its primary meaning. Though there are obscure passages in the Bible the essential meaning is sufficiently accessible to every loyal soul who approaches them with faith. In answer to the Reformation, the Council of Trent specified that the true meaning of Scripture could not be ascertained apart from the Church and tradition which are the place of its preservation and disclosure. But the Protestants responded to it by formulating the principle of 'verbal inspiration' and emphasized the self-sufficient character of Scripture.

3. Modern Trends and Pioneers

The period of Enlightenment brought vital changes in man's way of understanding and interpreting the text. People started investigating the

meaning of the phenomenon from a universe constructed outside the very realities of faith. The role of *a priori* meaning was diminished and hermeneutics became more a science of historical knowledge.

3.1 Romanticist hermeneutics / Schleiermacher

In the romanticist tradition, the goal of the interpreter is to reach behind the text to the mind of its author and ultimately to the creative experience which called the text into being. The rationale behind this approach is that the text is an objective residue of the creative experience of the author. The act of speaking or writing is a linguistic fact and that must be considered both from the historical level of the development of language and that of the development of the one who is speaking.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the pioneer of this approach, conceived hermeneutics as the art of understanding, which starting from the simple fact of understanding and dwelling on the nature of language and the relation between the one who speaks and the one who understands develops its rules in a coherent system. He proposes a circular nature of hermeneutical enquiry at two levels. Firstly, the interpreter has to undertake a creative leap, on the one hand, into the provisional understanding of the text as a whole, and on the other hand, into the understanding of its parts, i.e. its component words and phrases. To him there must happen a circular interplay between the process of grasping the whole and grasping the parts. Secondly, similar exchange has to take place between the linguistic and psychological processes. At the linguistic plane the consideration of grammar and vocabulary play a major part. At the psychological stage the interpreter must enter into the psychology of the author⁵.

3.2 Existential hermeneutics / Heidegger and Bultmann

The well known existentialist, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), began his reflections with the intuition that man cannot make an enquiry without beginning from his/her given horizons. A person will interpret what he or she sees in terms of the purposes and practical standpoints around which he or her life is organized. Heidegger brought this existential facet into the science of hermeneutics. Since the privileged place where being

⁵ A.C. Thiselton, Hermeneutics, in: *New Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 295-296.

manifests itself is the *Dasein*, the human being, it is here that one can study the meaning of a text. Hermeneutic is not simply an act of explaining words because such a study has only limited capacity to carry the fullness of understanding.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) brought the existentialist thinking into the biblical hermeneutics. He developed the hermeneutical problems at three levels: the questioning of the historicity of the gospels, the relevance of our knowledge of the historical Jesus to our faith in the Christ of kerygma and the demythologization of the NT message. According to him the majority of Jesus' sayings and the gospel stories have been created by the primitive Christian community. They are formulated in a language that shows signs of the mystical vision of the Judeo-Hellenistic world. In order to make them acceptable to mankind today they need to be translated anew or demythologized into modern language, the language of existentialism.⁶

In Bultmann's view, the biblical writings are universal statements about God and man only apparently. Their primary purpose is existential or practical i.e. calling persons to appropriate attitudes and responses of will. For example the sentence like, 'God will judge the world' is not to be interpreted as a statement about future event but as a call to assume man's responsibility in the present moment. Similarly the statement that 'Jesus is Lord' is not so much to explicate Christ's cosmic status but it is rather an invitation to let Christ direct and control our life.⁷

3.3 Hans Georg Gadamer

H.G. Gadamer (1900-2002) was not merely interested in setting the methods of interpretation because according to him understanding happens even before the methods are discerned. His attention was therefore to state the conditions governing the possibility of an effective understanding itself. Among these conditions he found space for prejudgments. Prejudgment is not opposite to reason; it is a necessary component of understanding, linked to the finite historical character of human being. Tradition is another condition that has to shape the process

⁶ P. Grech, Hermeneutics, in: *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, pp. 420-421.

⁷ A.C. Thiselton, Hermeneutics, in: *New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 296.

of interpretation. It is not a dead hand from the past but the living stream of the community's life without which the present is deprived of meaning.⁸

In the context of textual interpretation, the significant contribution of Gadamer is the concept of fusion of horizon. In everyday language horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. To Gadamer, horizon stands for the world. In the act of understanding three horizons are involved: that of the author, of the text and of the reader. In interpretation, all these horizons are fused. Due to the enrichment of the understandings of these three worlds the reader discovers meaningful relationship of being within the text of which he or she was not aware earlier. Consequently a new horizon is formed which is wider than the horizon of the text, of the author and of the reader.⁹

3.4 Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005)

If Heidegger and Gadamer took hermeneutics to questions of philosophy, language and ontology, Paul Ricoeur brought it back to its primary concern, the interpretation of texts. In biblical theology he addressed directly the fundamental issues as revelation, authority and nature of the sacred text. He saw language not as literal but as figurative, which contains many layers of meaning and which working together is capable of creating new insights.¹⁰ Ricoeur called it the 'surplus of meaning'.

Another important concept he developed under the influence of postmodern reading was that of 'second naivety'. When we read a text for the first time we read it at a superficial level and imagine as to what the text may mean. To him, this is the 'first naïve meaning'. Next he invites the reader to move from 'front of the text' to 'behind the text' and make a critical reading with all the available scientific tools at his/

⁸ J. Putty, *Hermeneutics Today*, in: *Hermeneutics: Truth or and Meaning, Philosophical Compendium 1993-1994*, Kondadaba: St. John's Regional Seminary, pp. 8-12.

⁹ A. S. Jenson, *Theological Hermeneutics*, London: SCM Press, 2007, p. 140.

¹⁰ D. Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, pp. 109-110.

her disposal including the paradigms set by the philosophers of suspicion: Freud, Marx and Nietzsche. After this critical reading the reader has to return 'in front of the text' and read it again. This he calls the 'second naivety'. The meaning he gets then becomes the starting point for further critical explanation of the text.¹¹

Ricoeur maintained that humankind must be studied through the cultural manifestations in history. Many of such cultural manifestations are codified in signs, symbols and myths which can play a retrospective function towards their own origin and a theological function towards the maturation of humanness. Myths are concerned with the outer shell of faith and not its core. Ricoeur is hence for decoding these symbols through the methods of psychoanalysis and other sciences in order that they become capable of speaking a language intelligible to human beings at present. Ricoeur's views have impact on Church hermeneutics as the language of the Bible is often symbolic (Gen 3-11). These myths should not be, in difference to Bultmann's view, emptied of its intellectual contents, but integrated into the theological reflection on the true meaning of revelation.¹²

3.5 Socio-critical hermeneutics

This approach entered into the theological hermeneutics from the social sciences which called attention to the role of 'interest' in interpreting texts. Interest of the interpreter shape what seem to be explained as the natural interpretations as he or she lives within the framework of particular social practices and conventions. In theology this approach is employed by the subaltern theologies to interpret the biblical passages regarding slavery, women, poor, etc. Influenced by this approach the Latin American liberation theologians call for a reading of the biblical texts in the context of the social struggles and social praxis of our day. Contextual ideologies like Feminism, Dalit and Tribal theologies, Black theology and eco-theology which make use of socio-critic hermeneutics reject the Western scholarship as they seem to perpetuate the capitalist agendas.¹³

¹¹ A. S. Jenson, *Theological Hermeneutics*, pp. 144-146.

¹² P. Grech, Hermeneutics, in: *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, p. 422.

¹³ A.C. Thiselton, Hermeneutics, in: *New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 296.

4. Basic Presumptions for Fruitful Hermeneutics

The discussion above shows that the present day Christian hermeneutics has gone beyond its old biblical circle and includes the new trends and theories coming from the natural and social sciences. It has got some negative effects too. The uncertainties and conflicts that appear in those spheres affect badly Church hermeneutics. Fortunately, in midst of the uncertainties exist some factors that are liable to set directives for a meaningful hermeneutical praxis in the Church.¹⁴

4.1 All human understanding is historically conditioned

It refers to the fact that both the object for interpretation and the interpreter belong to a certain period of time. The recognition of this temporal factor makes some demands on the interpreter. Among them the most important is the claim for historical and linguistic scholarship which is necessary to discern the effects of the text on the previous interpreters.

4.2 All human understanding is linguistically conditioned

Language itself is interpretive in the sense that to know a language is to understand time, objects and action in a certain way. Understanding language includes understanding language of the text and that of the interpreter. For religious textual studies it demands on the interpreter to be informed of the persuasive impact of language in grammatical, literary, rhetorical, philosophical and spiritual ways.

4.3 All human understanding is interpretative

Understanding is not a matter of self-evident observation but rather the interpretation of experience 'as' something. It means that understanding is always mediated by a series of factors which are not often evident. For religious studies it would call into question the so called 'self-evident literal' meaning of the texts.

4.4 Interpretation passes through hermeneutic circle

Since understanding depends largely on the interpreter, any interpretation cannot but be an explanation from a particular view-point.

¹⁴ J. McCarthy, *Hermeneutics, A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, pp. 221-223; P. Grech, *Hermeneutics*, in: *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, pp. 423-424.

This paves the way for the imperialization of the meaning by the interpreter. In order to get away this risk the hermeneutic circle engages in a balancing act between the object for interpretation and the interpretative intent. This dialogue helps the interpreter to become aware of his own prejudgments and the limits and demands that are put on him by the object of interpretation. Consequence for Church is that her understanding is open to critical revision through a change in the interpretative view-point, textual methods and culture.

4.5 Respect for the tradition

The language of NT is evolved from the preaching of the apostles and that explains the intimate relation between the word of God and the tradition of the Church. Hence the meaning of the biblical passages is to be explained according to the mind of the Church. It does not mean that tradition is to be materially repeated but interpreted to facilitate its organic growth.

4.6 Respect for the interpreter

This means that the texts entrusted to the Church contains greater possibilities of interpretation than the meaning foreseen by the human author in his particular context. It is part of God's saving activity that the Spirit continues to communicate in the texts through the words of the interpreter meanings that surpass their historically limited literal sense.

4.7 Praxis-based hermeneutics

One of the questions related to hermeneutics is, 'what such formal studies bring for the well-being of humanity?' The contingent aspect of interpretation demands from the interpreter to understand the bearing of the text on the contemporary world. It does not happen in a linear way i.e. as the finished result of a methodological study. The present social and cultural context is such that the action reflects on the text to allow for the recovery of forgotten meanings in the text. Best example in this regard would be Pope Francis who, through his challenging gestures and interpretations, helps the Church to rediscover the hidden meanings of Jesus' words and deeds. Hermeneutics must precede *a priori* an inner moment of application.

5. Concluding Questions

This brief introduction to the hermeneutical minefield makes us aware of the different elements to be taken care of in reading, understanding and interpreting the texts and events. Before winding up let us point out a few challenges which would help us to take ahead some of the crucial unsolved issues of hermeneutics in our further debate and reflections.

i) According to the ancient supposition, text is meaningful because it contains *logos*, the thought produced by the author through the silent inner conversation with his soul. And hermeneutics was preoccupied with removing the obstacles in the way of understanding this *logos*. At a later stage we know that this obstacle cannot be fully removed because the inner word in the text cannot be fully translated into external word without loss. Several factors are involved in the game. The utterances are primarily the author's words but they are conditioned by perceptions and events of his time, of which he/she might not have been necessarily aware and hence he/she might not have consciously translated the *logos* in the utterance. Secondly, the readers or listeners interpret the utterance in terms of the experience they derive from it and in this act also they are conditioned by their own states of mind, prejudices, psychological issues and social circumstances.¹⁵ If communication in utterance is thus flawed at different stages how can we ascribe credibility to hermeneutics as an epistemological science? Can the scientific tools at our disposal remove these hurdles and bring us near to the proper *logos*?

ii) Introspection into the very course of hermeneutics makes us realize that, over and above the difficulty for the inner word to come into the external word without loss, there is another risk in the process: the methods used in the process are vulnerable and they may distort the very practice of understanding. As Jacques Derrida has rightly said, many of the metaphysical concepts in use for scientific research contain binary prejudices of an era which are incorporated into it because of special interests of the corporations.¹⁶ Unless these hierarchical suppositions

¹⁵ A. S. Jenson, *Theological Hermeneutics*, pp. 224-225.

¹⁶ S. Agacinski, Jacques Derrida, *Dictionnaire des philosophes*, D. Huisman (ed.), PUF: Paris, 1984, p. 713.

are not undermined the research risks to be subjective. In hermeneutics, it is probable that the criteria of truth, knowledge and application used in the process are themselves socially, politically, sexually and ideologically biased. And if we deconstruct the biased presuppositions implied in the hermeneutical tools what would then be the role of tradition?

iii) Until the dawn of postmodern era there was some sort of unity in the field of interpretation thanks to the homogeneous world views and metaphysical appeal in the mind of people. But with the emergence of pluralistic thoughts, the universe of meaning has no center. Truth does not possess any quality of absoluteness. People are more and more used to manifold cultures in which a variety of systems of thought, world-views or explanations of reality coexist without any one of these having gained hegemony over others. Such plural claims of truth steer relativity in understanding and in interpreting texts and events. Relative hermeneutics affects badly common platforms of discussion and living-together in society. What is the way out? Can we claim that hermeneutics must adopt a metaphysics which assures some kind of objectivity in interpretation?

iv) The postmodern critics like Derrida and Barthes contemplated the “end of book”. The World Wide Web that is alive around us gives us the feeling that their prophecy has already become a reality. Computers became the preserve of the educated and affluent society. The specter of cyberspace and information technology transforms its sense of reality. In the web media culture the old dimensions of time and space function no more. In this case what would be the future of the written word and history of interpretation?¹⁷ Can we discover a new mode of hermeneutics capable of understanding and interpreting the cyber communication?

The anxieties stipulated above show that there can't be any undisputed interpretation of the texts or events inside the Church and out in the world. We have no other option but to live with such uncertainties. Hope that it will put in a dynamism promoting circularity of understanding.

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¹⁷ D. Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, pp. 134-135

Editorial

It is fifty years since the beginning of the II Vatican Council that inaugurated an era of dialogue at all levels in the Catholic Church. The Council reinstated much of what was lost after the Patristic Age. This is especially true of the Church's relation to other religions. In the reflections of the Church Fathers – till about 450 – the divine Logos, the universal principle of divine self-communication, vibrates in all religions and cultures. In the light of the incarnational self-manifestation of the Logos in Jesus Christ, they could look at the Scriptures, symbols and sages of other religions with great respect. In fact much of the early Christian theology was fertilized through a creative encounter between Christian faith and the Greek wisdom.

As the Church moved from the catacombs to the imperial throne the attitudes to other religions became arrogant and judgmental. This is clearly seen in the formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (Fulgentius of Raspe), which became the guiding principle in the mass conversion in Europe (I millennium) and in the missionary movements in the world at large (II millennium). In the 19th century Christian Europe became increasingly aware of the richness of the Scriptural and spiritual heritage of other religions. In the 20th century Europe lost its colonial hegemony over the countries in other continents. A new self-consciousness grew in the peoples of other religions. Christian theologians tried to look at the entire humanity as the *people of God*, and the universal history as the history of revelation. With the declaration *Nostra aetate* the II Vatican Council exhorted Catholics “to look at other religions with sincere respect” and “to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these people as well as the values in their society and

culture.” The mainstream Protestant and Orthodox Churches too initiated a culture of dialogue, as evident in the WCC documents.

In this issue of *Jeevadhara* a theological review is attempted on some of the developments of the last fifty years. There is a clear shift from the traditional ecclesiocentrism towards theocentrism without losing the grounding on Christocentrism. Vincent Sekhar reflects critically on some of the major Church documents of the last five decades. Alangaram reviews the documents of the Federation of the Asian Bishops Conferences on inter-religious relations.

The subsequent three articles focus on three major theologians. Mathew W.I. Dunn examines how far Jacques Dupuis’ Christocentric perspective enables a culture of dialogical relation with others. Francis D’Sa explores the consequences of Raimon Panikkar’s theo-centric vision for affirming the secular reality. Jacob Parappally presents the anthropocentric views of Sebastian Kappen for a liberative process of inter-religious encounter. Finally S. Painadath explores the wider horizons of inter-religious relations with the texts of Pope John Paul II.

It is amazing to see the vast amount of theological literature on Christianity’s openness to other religions and the creative initiatives of dialogue taken by Christian communities in the recent years. What has been a deficit in Christianity in one thousand five hundred years has been to a great extent compensated in the last fifty years. We do live in a period of grace (*kairos*) in the history of the Church. “Dialogue is the new way of being the Church,” said Pope Paul VI during the Council (Eccl.suam 63). May all the creative initiatives of all religions be guided by the divine Spirit that *blows where it wills*.

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Loyal to the Past, Free unto the Future

Reflection on some post Vat.II Documents on *Dialogue*

Vincent Sekhar

Vincent Sekhar studies carefully some of the major documents of the Catholic Church on inter-religious relationships. He clarifies how in the wake of Vatican II the official Church swings between the traditional ecclesio-centrism and the patristic Christo-centrism. He shows how far theo-centrism opens new windows and anthropo-centrism relates dialogue with human issues. Vincent Sekhar SJ is Director of the Institute for Dialogue with Cultures and Religions, Loyola Campus, Chennai.

The Catholic Church has travelled 50 years after Vatican II. This Council has been a “conversion experience for the Catholic Church.”¹ Already in 1980’s, the Church saw new orientations and guidelines in dialogue with other religious traditions, new boundaries in the interest of a new kind of openness, and the Church shed its old identity in favour of a new one with *negotiation and pain*.² The Church documents contain the essence of Christian beliefs and practices and they are many in number. A few documents spell out the basic faith of the Church, its mission in this world, the dynamics of relations especially with the members of other faiths and the subsequent changes that have taken place in the attitudes of the Church.

¹ Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J., *Catholic Identity After Vatican II: Three types of faith in the One Church*, Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1985, pp. 19-21

² For the process of dialogue and debate on the sources of revelation and on the Church and its outcome, see, Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Kommonchak: *History of Vatican II*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1997, pp. 347-357

Documents for Study

The documents³ I have chosen for reflection are categorized according to their contents at three levels: (a) at the level of faith (b) at the level of mission and (c) at the level of attitude and relations. The first category of documents brings out the central message of Christian belief and the basic faith of the Church. They are *Dei Verbum* (Vat. II, 1965) and *Redemptor Hominis* (John Paul II, 4th March 1979). The second category of documents highlights the Church activities and all that relates to its mission; they are *Ecclesiam Suam* (Paul VI, 1964), *Ad Gentes* (Vat. II, 1965), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI, 8th December, 1975), and *Redemptoris Missio* (John Paul II, 22nd January, 1991). And the third category of documents concerning the Church's attitudes and relation to the members of other faiths consists of *Dignitatis Humanae* (Vat. II, 1965) and *Nostra Aetate* (Vat. II, 1965). There are three other documents which deal with topics like dialogue, mission, proclamation, etc. Their contents overlap all three levels. They are *Dialogue and Mission* (from the Secretariat for Non-Christians, 1984), *Dialogue and Proclamation* (Joint declaration of the Secretariats for Non-Christians and for Evangelization of people, 1991), *Ecclesia in Asia* (Asian Synod document: Apostolic Exhortation given by Pope John Paul II on November 6, 1999), and *Dominus Iesus* (Declaration published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000).

All the documents especially those of Vatican II have undergone several debates on schemes prepared earlier by the preparatory commissions and several amendments have been made to the texts before voting and promulgation by the Pope during public sessions. Every text contains scriptural quotations, references to earlier documents of the Church and to the writings of the Church Fathers and Saints, cross-

³ Flannery, Austin, O.P., Gen. Ed., Vatican II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents. St. Paul's Publications, Bombay. 1975; Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* of Pope John Paul II. St. Paul's Publications, Bombay. 1979; Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of His Holiness Pope Paul VI. NBCLC, Bangalore, 1977; *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Pope John Paul II. 1991; Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II. Pauline Publications, Bombay. 1994; *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Pope John Paul II. 1991; *Ecclesia in Asia*: post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* on November 6, 1999

references etc. A careful line of thought and argument has been followed in order to preserve the tradition and to avoid self-contradictions. Each document is written with due stress on the topic discussed without losing sight of the wider context. Generally, the documents address the wider humanity. However, they also contain specific messages and instructions to the Christian community. The language used varies according to the nature of the document, sometimes biblical and theological and, at other, human and pastoral.

Specific thrust of these documents

i) *At the level of Faith*

As the Council's crown jewel in many ways, **Dei Verbum**, the document on *Divine Revelation* contends that Revelation is God's self-communication to humanity (2) and it takes place on multiple fronts: creation, history of Israel and the early Church, the person and history of Jesus (3-4). Contact with God is possible through human experiences and through reflection on created realities (3). It is an important opening to other religious aspirations of all people. It suggests that it is the 'God-talk' and not its particular revelation that would serve as the common reference point in building a theology of religion. The sacred Scripture contains many such passages to affirm this: 'In goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself' (Eph.1/9); 'Out of abundance of his love he speaks to men as friends' (Ex.33:11; Jn. 15:14-15); 'God gives men an enduring witness to created realities' (Rom.1:19-20) etc. When the particular articulation of God's self communication or revelation is understood and explained in essentialist and exclusivist categories, say, like 'doctrine' and 'divine truths' and 'eternal decree of his will' (2,6) the Church is careful in allowing free theological development. Normally, absolutist claims often negate human experience of relativity and change and theologians could still argue on questions of 'theological absolutes'.

The Church seems to balance between the idea of inspiration, inerrancy, etc. and human authorship. On the one hand, the Church processes that the Scripture has God as the author, that it is inspired by him, that it is without error; on the other hand, the role of human authors as well as the various levels of *truth* appropriate to different literary modes are also explicitly acknowledged (11-13). Thus the role of human

authors and the time-conditioned circumstances of these authors are taken into account. Since the Scriptures form the basis of the Church's self-understanding, the Church becomes more and more aware of the dynamic and developmental sense of both its Scripture and its tradition. This is much endorsed by acknowledging the historical-critical method of biblical research: a careful investigation of the meaning, which the sacred writers really had in mind. (12); an awareness of the literary forms of the varieties of truth; the stages of formation of the Gospels are formulated (19).

Such a critical awareness of the background for the Scriptural study opens once again to the understanding of the Scriptures of the followers of other faiths, their historical, cultural setting, etc. The developmental dynamic embedded in the understanding of the Scriptures and traditions paves way to more openness to truth and that, which helps dialogue at the religious level. Though biblical scholarship is praised and encouraged (23), *Dei Verbum* reaffirms the decisive role of the Church authority in providing official interpretation. There are words of caution and exhortation to vigilance and fidelity (23). This is understandable because this reveals the human dimension of any divine institution, which would want to preserve its tradition.

Redemptor Hominis (John Paul II, 1979) contains the basic theological faith-affirmations of the Church. The key sentences concerning the mystery of Christ are (7-10): 'God so loved the world that he gave his only son' (Jn. 3:16); 'Jesus became our reconciliation with the Father' (Rom. 5:11; Col.1:28); 'he fully reveals man to himself'; 'he is the way and the truth' (Jn. 14:6) and 'the resurrection and the life' (Jn. 11:25); 'seeing him we see the Father' (Jn. 14:9); in him are 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col.2/3); 'the Church is his body' (Rom.12:5; 1 Cor.6:15; 10:17; 12:12, 22; Eph. 1:23; 2:16; 4:4; Col.1:24; 3:15). This mystery of Christ is basic to Christianity and the driving force to the Church's mission activities in the world. The Church feels responsible for this truth (19) and by 'transmitting and teaching that truth' the Church fulfills Christ's mandate 'Go and make disciples of all nations....' (Mt. 28:19 f).

Any religious tradition will have its faith articulations. The faith experience starts with an individual and later shared with a community

of believers through close disciples. For Christians, the apostles' faith experience needs to be personalized and absorbed in order to be witnesses like them. The Christological experience has to be rooted in every personal history and explained in terms of personal witness. The intrinsic value of faith experience is common to all religious traditions. However, unless this is experienced at a deeper level, the religious communities cannot understand the inner unity of religions. To be rooted in one's faith necessarily implies this experience of the inner unity of religions. In addition, this is essential in every form of inter-religious dialogue.

ii) At the level of Mission

At the level of mission, *Ad Gentes* of Vat.II says that the Church is 'missionary' by its very nature (2). The missionary spirit is spelt out in making visible throughout the world the universal human call to participate in divine life symbolized by the Incarnation of God's Son (3). Defining specifically what is meant by *mission*, the decree says that it is the 'work of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church among people who do not yet believe in Christ' (6). This missionary activity is undertaken in obedience to Christ's command to 'go and make disciples of all nations....' (Mt. 28:19f). Quoting the sacred Scriptures, the Church states clearly that 'all must be incorporated into him by baptism and into the Church which is his body' (7). However, the decree does not say anything about the members of other faiths especially how they are related to Christ or how they are saved. What is implicitly said is that unless others are incorporated into his body, the Church, they are not saved.

The Church, until recently, continued to believe in the Old Testament paradigm of a *zealous God* leading nation against nation, and followed the same belief in its missionary aim and strategy. The decree says that the missions have aimed at enhancing humanity's global life: 'the Gospel always offers itself as a leaven with regards to brotherhood, unity and peace' (8). The Church presumes that its activity has the power to bring about 'renewed humanity imbued with....love, sincerity, peace.' (8)

By saying this, the Church does not implicitly deny the inner power and potentials of the Scriptures of other religious traditions. Moreover, Indian religious history evidently shows that each religious tradition has

for centuries been animating its community of believers in faith, relationships, morality and life. Its history also shows that inter-personal, inter-religious and inter-cultural relationships have often enriched life. Any singular ideology or uniformity in practice has not been successful in Indian faith life. The boundaries have often been challenged and opened up for newer understanding. Each religious institution believes that the source for the universal well-being is available in its Scriptures. This becomes meaningful when it is proved in personal and collective life. And, expectedly, this is what the decree stresses in many places: it wants every Christian 'to bear witness to the Gospel primarily through personal life.' (11) The Church identifies Christian witness with sharing in the cultural and social life (of its neighborhood) and the various exchanges and enterprises of human living, familiarity with national and religious tradition, etc. (11) It is thus a deep theology from below that seems to unite people in brotherhood, unity and peace.

Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paul VI, 1976) once again affirms that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the 'essential mission' of the Church (14): 'This is the vocation proper to the Church' (15). Evangelization, for the Church, means 'transforming humanity from within and making it new through the influence of the Good News' (18): through proclamation (20,22) and through personal witness (21). It necessarily involves conversion of heart and outlook (18, 36), entry into the community, acceptance of signs, etc. (24). The Church remarks that the non-Christian religions are 'incomplete' in their search for God (53): 'they are all impregnated with innumerable seeds of the Word and can constitute a true preparation for the Gospel' (53). And it also affirms that 'our religion effectively established with God an authentic and living relationship, which the other religions don't succeed in doing, even though...their arms stretched out towards heaven' and it is the 'religion of Jesus that objectively places man in relation with the plan of God with his living presence and with his action' (53). Here the Church explicitly asserts its adequacy and superiority of the 'religion and Jesus'. Later *Dominus Iesus*, a Declaration in 2000 published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, would reiterate the same thing. While the document acknowledges the spiritual riches of non-Christian religious traditions, it also points out that they contain

'gaps, insufficiencies and errors,' and they "receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain" (*Dominus Iesus* 8) and "they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his." (*Dominus Iesus* 12, 14)⁴

For the first time in the post-Conciliar period, the Church makes such statements and passes judgement on other religions. The Church follows the strategy of 'yes....but' and 'alright...and yet' when it compares other religious traditions with the 'religion of Jesus'. This is all in the enthusiasm and belief that the Church possesses the fullness of truth, that it is clear about the purpose of Divine revelation and that it wants to be the 'Minister' to pass on this truth with complete fidelity (15). But this attitude will soon change as 'dialogue' becomes imperative and *integral* part of its mission.

iii) At the level of Attitude and Relations

The Church seems to be growing more towards openness. It reaches out to others slowly and cautiously. It has a long way to go. The term 'dialogue' is used for the first time in *Ecclessiam Suam* (Paul VI, 1964): it is both an attitude of the Church while in contact with the humanity and also identified with the Church's mission of proclamation of the Gospel. God's self-communication to humanity through Christ in the Holy Spirit is seen as a dialogue between God and man and the dynamics is termed as 'the dialogue of salvation'. Dialogue is also a method of accomplishing the apostolic mission and this method adapts itself to the needs of a concrete situation and chooses the appropriate means. The spirit of dialogue is friendship, even more, it is service. But the Church is careful not to compromise on the principles of faith. Hence it would

⁴ Francis A. Sullivan, writing on the impact of *Dominus Iesus* on Ecumenism says, "Although the major theme of the document *Dominus Iesus* concerns the role of Christ and his church in the salvation of people who do not share Christian faith, the strongest reactions to it have come from spokespersons of the other Christian churches. In the view of many of them, this document has ignored or even negated the progress toward reconciliation that had been made in over 30 years of ecumenical dialogue." (America, Oct. 28, 2000 - <http://americamagazine.org/issue/386/article/impact-dominus-iesus-ecumenism>)

determine the limits and forms and paths to be followed in maintaining and furthering a living and fruitful dialogue.

Around this time comes the Church document on Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (Vat.II, 1965). It is said to be something of a great innovation in the official Church. In the background of 'growing relationship' (No. 1) and 'peace' as the motive force for such relationship the Church gives first consideration to what men have in common and to what strengthens the bond of relationship (1). Had this document not been released, there would be less and less of interfaith prayer, participation, appreciation, exchange, interfaith retreat, live-together, reading of the texts from other religions, and the like in the parishes, classrooms, neighbourhoods, etc. This is not true only in India, although interreligious dialogue has been its on-going experience for several centuries, but also a worldwide practice after this document emerged.⁵

This document gives an official sanction to genuine dialogue between religions and also a fine starting point for constructing a theology of religions. Keeping man and his life at the centre, the Church, for the first time, reflects on the positive side of religions and their role in establishing peace in the world: the Church acknowledges and promotes the good in all religions (2); it urges the Christians to co-operate and dialogue with the members of other religions (2) for mutual understanding, for social justice, for morality, for peace and freedom (3); it repudiates discrimination on account of religion (5). The Church declares that human questions and problems are common to everybody and each religious tradition has to respond to the mystery of human life. Thus the institutions and structure of secular society become integral to the preaching of the Gospel and such a mission is to be taken in a 'religious sense'. The Church here acknowledges the theology of liberation, which keeps man and his life at the centre of faith-reflection. It is noteworthy to state that Christian Churches cannot identify themselves as the Kingdom of God. They may

⁵ Sr. Susan: *Nostra Aetate A Walking Stick for the Journey*. Dilatato Corde. Vol.III. 2 July-December 2013 (http://www.dimmid.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={3D3CA348-6E08-4162-A37E-83008C228822}&DE=)

in some way pertain to the Kingdom, but the reign of God in human lives transcends by far the social boundaries of the Christian Churches.⁶

The Church also acknowledges the riches in the religious heritage of Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism and it also feels sorry for the anti-Semitic attitude towards Judaism. But at the same time the Church is careful not to relegate its own faith and tradition to an inferior position. It rather affirms that Christ has the fullness of truth and he it is who reconciles all things to himself. Christianity provides a normative standard for judging the truth and adequacy of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Church does not explicitly recognize the Divine beings both revealed and hidden in other religious traditions. For instance, it does not say anything about the role of Muhammad or the authority of the Qur'an as definitive Divine revelation while appreciating the 'common elements' between the Muslims and the Christians. While the Church urges its members to co-operate and to dialogue with other religions....it also admonishes them to do it 'with prudence and love' (2). While on the one hand the Church repudiates any discrimination or oppression on account of race or class, on account of colour or religion, or 'on the basis of any theory or practice,' yet, on the other, it also affirms its own exclusive religious claims of fullness, finality, uniqueness etc., suggesting again an attitude of superiority.

Similarly in *Dignitatis Humanae*⁷ (Vat. II, 1965) the Church basically respects human conscience. It acknowledges both psychological freedom and immunity from external coercion (2) especially in the practice of religion (3). Neither the civil nor the religious authority can control or restrict one's free and public expressions of one's philosophy of life (3). The Church implicitly acknowledges the limits of religion in a secular society. The rights of an individual or a group should be regulated by the principles of public peace, morality and good order: 'Religious liberty has a further purpose and aim in enabling men to act with greater

⁶ Gerald M. Fagin, S.J. ed. Vatican II: Open Questions and New Horizons. Michael Glazier, Inc. Wilmington, Delaware, 1984, p. 15

⁷ For a detailed and critical study of the document see Burghardt, Walter j. ed. Religious Freedom: 1965 & 1975 A Symposium on a Historic Document, Paulist Press. New York, 1977, pp. 16-38

responsibility in fulfilling their own obligation in society (8). The Church affirms that human response to God should be genuinely free. But the Church's mission motive may look contradictory. The Church explicitly says that from the very beginning of the Church the disciples strove to convert men to confess Christ as Lord...by the 'power' of the Word of God (11) and not by coercion or by any means or techniques unworthy of the Gospel. It may be true. But it is also true that the Church would identify dialogue as a method of accomplishing the apostolic mission (Ref. *Ecclesiam Suam* and *Ad Gentes* Nos. 2, 6, 35-36 etc.). The Church is aware of both sides, also becomes conscious of its past failures in the matter of religious freedom and it explicitly acknowledges them (12).

The Secretariat for Non-Christians was instituted in 1964 with an aim that the members of other faiths may be known honestly and be esteemed justly by Christians and they, in turn, can adequately know and esteem Christian doctrine and life. Fifty years of experience of dialogue has definitely made an impact on the Church's attitude towards other believers and its relationship between dialogue and mission. The Secretariat's document on *Dialogue and Mission* (1984) is more pastoral than theological in character. Evangelization and dialogue are found together in the mission of the Church. It mentions that dialogue is an integral part of the mission. This attitude has, to some extent, altered the earlier conception of mission, namely 'the Church making itself fully present in all persons and peoples....' (*Ad Gentes*, 5) and 'founding the Church among peoples or groups in which it has not yet taken root' (*Ad Gentes*, 6). The new understanding of mission is 'to work for the extension of the Kingdom and its values among men and women' (25). The Church itself is called towards the Kingdom along with the rest of humanity (25); it is oriented towards God's reign and not towards 'its own' establishment as seen in the earlier documents (*Ad Gentes*, 6).

An attitude of openness has broadened the horizons, making "dialogue the way to a better future."⁸ The document quotes such passages from Scripture to make mission all-inclusive and fraternal: variety of charisms and plurality of services (1 Cor. 12:28-30; Eph. 4:11-12; Rom. 12:6-8). Once again the Church stresses the freedom of conscience

⁸ Fernandes, Angelo: *ibid.*, p. 228

and declares coercion as an 'abuse of one's right' (18). The Church had earlier mentioned 'conversion' as the necessary ingredient of missionary proclamation (*Ad Gentes*, 13). But now in the context of dialogue, the Church emphasizes more on the 'spiritual process' of conversion of 'all persons' (37). In this respect, the document reiterates that 'no one must be constrained to act against his conscience.' (38)

In this document the Church becomes more 'human-centred' and 'value-oriented' than 'faith-centred' and 'Church-oriented': 'Man is the first path, which the Church ought to traverse in carrying out its mission' (19); 'Christian mission can never be separated from love and respect for others' (19). Mutuality is affirmed in genuine dialogue: 'mutual affirmation, reciprocal correction and fraternal exchange' (21). The Christian claim of fullness of truth recedes to the background and the Church positively acknowledges one's own limitations: 'One does not possess the truth in a perfect and total way but can walk together with others towards that goal.' (21, 40) This is a big change in the attitude of the Church.

The Church, for the first time, presents a theological basis for dialogue in the *Trinitarian* Mystery where one can see 'in God a life of communion and interchange' (22). It witnesses 'the power of grace which elevates and redeems in the life of each individual and every people' (22) as gifts of the Father; the Spirit also works outside the visible confines of the mystical body' (24) (see *Redemptor Hominis* and *Ad Gentes* 15). A theology centred on the divine Father and open to the Holy Spirit is more open to other faiths than an exclusively Christ-centred theology.

The document has asserted the uniqueness of dialogue in the Church's mission: dialogue is the 'norm and necessary manner' (29); each Christian is called to dialogue by reason of one's human and Christian vocation (30). The Church recognizes that mutual enrichment is possible only in pluralistic religious context. Implicitly, it affirms that there would be a change in the theological climate and faith assertions when there is a genuine dialogue at the religious level. The openness with which the Church has approached this subject of dialogue and mission is definitely an effect nearly after decades of dialogue experience with other religions.

Now, there were anxieties regarding the Church's original missionary charism namely, 'the preaching of the Gospel'. There were doubts whether this particular charism of the Church had been replaced by inter-religious dialogue and whether respect of conscience and freedom of religion overlooked all efforts at conversion. Questions were raised: was it not possible to attain salvation in any religion? If then, why should there be missionary activity? Basing on the very foundations of mission, *Dialogue and proclamation* (Joint declaration of the Secretariats for Non-Christians and for Evangelization of people, 1991) treats the positive value of religions and their relationship to the Church (DP 14-41). This document has many significant parts on the role of non-Christian religions (14-41), on the theological value of proclamation (55-71), on the disposition for and obstacles to dialogue and proclamation etc.

Redemptoris Missio (John Paul II, 1991) insists on the lasting priority of proclamation, its content, and its goal (44-48), the whole complex of inter-religious relations (55), its many forms¹ and expressions (57). It asserts that proclamation 'is the foundation, centre and at the same time at the summit' of the evangelizing mission: all forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation...just as the whole economy of salvation has its centre in Christ, so too all missionary activity is directed to the proclamation of this mystery (44). Dialogue and proclamation should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were inter changeable (44,55). The Church has the obligation, opportunity, and freedom to proclaim it. It also respects the freedom of choice of individuals and peoples (7-8, 11, 35, 39, 46-47; DP 9, 69-70). In dialogue, other religious traditions constitute a positive challenge to the Church; they stimulate the Church both to discover and to acknowledge the sign of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of revelation which she has received for the goodness of all' (56). Dialogue is an integrating element of mission in the sense that all missionary activity is brought about in respect for the person and culture.

Dialogue and Proclamation (1991) distinguishes evangelization, dialogue, and proclamation by their distinct functions (8-10). But it stresses that dialogue and proclamation are both oriented towards the communication of salvific truth (2). The Church looks at other religious

traditions as 'profound mysteries of the human conditions' (14, *Nostra Aetate* 1). And yet, open and positive approach to other religious traditions cannot overlook the contradictions....between them and Christian revelation (31). But all are challenged in dialogue (32). All religious traditions should find themselves to be companions on the common path (79). But the document clearly maintains the older positions that the other religious traditions may discover the 'seeds of the Word' in their 'search for the unknown or incompletely known God' (82, EN 53) and proclamation is to be 'pursued' despite difficulties with full respect for freedom through inter-religious dialogue (84). In this way, dialogue is clearly made a 'medium' or a 'technique' for the Church's mission of proclamation. Thus, dialogue remains oriented towards proclamation (82).

In *Dialogue and Mission* (1984) there was opening to other religious traditions. We find in it confession of one's own limitations, wishing to walk together, grow together and co-operate particularly in human and pastoral context to establish the Kingdom of God in terms of peace, justice, brotherhood etc. After this document there has not been much progress in the path of the Church's encounter with other religious traditions. Although *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) was the outcome of a dialogue between the two pontifical Councils, one for Dialogue and the other for Evangelization, the document keeps proclamation at the centre of the Church's missionary activity and relegates dialogue to the periphery as it means.

This document is written from a Christian standpoint addressing other religious traditions. There is an implicit 'I-thou' relationship and not much of a 'We' concept. The document contains ideas such as 'incompleteness in the other' 'ineffectiveness of the others', 'God's plan for others', 'their right to know the Christian mysteries', etc. The Church does recognize mutuality and reciprocity in dialogue but it does not mention clearly what sort of effect such mutuality could bring about at the theological and religious levels. The Church should, in the future, acknowledge and articulate the effects of dialogue particularly at these levels. It is the experience of dialogue that would adequately and meaningfully construct a theology of religions.

Ecclesia in Asia, known as the "the Magna Carta for the evangelization of Asia in the Third Millennium" and "Pastoral Directive"

is the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, given at Delhi on 6th November 1999 by Pope John Paul II during his visit to India. The reflection and renewal in the Church started with the publication of the *Lineamenta* in 1996 and it continued with the discussion on the *Instrumentum Laboris* in 1998. The discussion reached its apex with the month-long Synod sessions in Rome from April 18 to May 14, 1998 and culminated with the proclamation of the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*.⁹

Ecclesia in Asia has three major sections: 1) Asian realities relevant to the Church and her mission of Evangelization (5-9); 2) Theological-doctrinal aspects of faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (10-23); and 3) The Church's mission of love and service in Asia (24-49). The document says, "a critical awareness of the complex realities of Asia is essential if the people of God on the continent are to respond to God's will for them in the new evangelization" (5). The local Churches in Asia should, for this new evangelization, take into great consideration "their cultural patterns and ways of thinking" for the sake of presenting the mystery of Christ "in a way that appeals to the sensibilities of Asian peoples" (20). And hence the Church "needs to follow a pedagogy which will introduce people step by step to the full appreciation of the mystery." For instance, Jesus could be presented as the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the Compassionate Friend of the Poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One ... (20). And to this effect, inculturation, inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism, integral human promotion, etc. are "ways of preaching the Gospel" (21, 22, 29-30) and a "characteristic mode of the Church's life in Asia" (3).

Already in 1977, the Federation of the Asian Bishops Conferences, affirming these and other values, had stressed the 'incarnational rootedness' of the Church in Asia: As God became one of us to make his own, his Church in Asia must be Asian, like the Asian in all things except sin. But, even after fifty years, God's "only begotten Son., Jesus Christ the Saviour, who took flesh as an Asian" (1) is "often perceived as

⁹ James H. Kroeger, M. M., *Vidvayoti Journal of Theological Reflection [VJTR]*, 64, No. 1, (Jan. 2000), p. 11

foreign to Asia" (20). 'The Asian Church is also painfully aware that for over two thousand years Christianity has not taken root in the Asian soil. While the Church regrets over this predicament, it is not prepared to learn from the Wisdom of the Asian pluralistic trends and thoughts that allow new ways of being Church, which again is the action of the Holy Spirit in Asia, but holds on to the fulfillment theology: "all the religious values and longings for God as found in the Asian religions find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ' (6). Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man and the fullness of salvation comes from him alone (31) and the way he comes across to all and to the whole of creation is "in a new and mysterious way" (14). The Church takes pride in professing and saying this. But God's mysterious ways can also be found in the way Asia thinks and believes. To the Church "the proclamation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the one and only Saviour for all peoples..." is its "unique contribution to the peoples of the continent" (10). It feels obliged to carry on with this mission as this "precious light of faith cannot be hidden under the bushel" (cf. Mt 5:15) and "there can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord" (19) as the only Saviour (10, 16).

Though the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia might present "many complex aspects, both in content and method" (23) it "does not eliminate the need for the explicit proclamation of the Gospel in its fullness" (20; cf. 31). The Church is clear in what it says: "Only those with a mature and convinced Christian faith are qualified to engage in genuine inter-religious dialogue. Only Christians who are deeply immersed in the mystery of Christ and are happy in their faith community can without undue risk and with hope of positive fruit engage in inter-religious dialogue" (31). But the Church is also cautious in not projecting a wrong image of a *Big Brother* or *All Knower* in the process of its mission of proclamation. It says that the proclamation of Jesus Christ is not prompted by any sectarian motive or superiority complex (20; cf. 4, 31, 46). Every person has the right to know (or not to know) and accept (or not to accept) Jesus Christ in genuine freedom of conscience. In any religious encounter the Church "transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them" making Christian faith as "part of a people's cultural heritage." (11)

Asian theologians¹⁰ have raised questions regarding the Church's response to the quest of the Asian Churches for an *effective* presence of the Christians in this continent. The foremost of the questions is Christological. While the experience and the religious ethos of Asia, particularly India, is pluralistic and related to the ultimate transcendent reality, be it Brahman or God, the Church affirms Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the one and only Saviour for all peoples" (2, 6, 13, 14, 18, 20). For Asia, the affirmation of fullness belongs exclusively to God and God shares this with creation, with Jesus Christ. Hence God's revelation in and through Jesus Christ allows the people of Asia to experience this revelation in the diversity of religions. God's self-manifestation is always eschatological in nature, appearing at the end of time or history, and as Paddy Meagher describes, "a crowning revelation of God, of God's purpose, the way God acts to save ... the whole human race ... in the rich diversity of religions and their great inadequacies."¹¹

The NT community did give witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. But the faith expression or the faith formulation of this experience becomes "a priori" for most Asian religionists who believe and teach in the plurality of God's self-manifestation as mediating salvation (10). The Church could still be open to dialogue on this Asian religious reality and experience. The Church does recognize this, but is still not ready to accept its implications. And the Church continues to believe that Asian (other) religions "await their fulfillment in Jesus Christ" (9, 10, 14, 20, 31, 32). But this does not make any sense to the followers of other faiths because Jesus Christ has not been perceived by them as the response to their questions and needs. Neuner says that such statements are rather repulsive to them.¹² Again the Church is aware of this. Context does determine the way one grows in faith. It is true also of an Asian Christian. The Church implicitly affirms this when it says that the context exercises an important influence on the life and mission of the Redeemer as man

¹⁰ For reflections on Ecclesia in Asia, refer *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection [VJTR]*, 60 (1996), p. 73-78; 64, No. 1 (Jan. 2000); 64, No. 7 (July 2000); *Mission Today A New Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (July-Sept. 2000); *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXX, No. 177 (May 2000)

¹¹ *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXX No. 177, p. 269

¹² J. Neuner, S. J., *Vidyajyoti*, 64, No. 7 (July 2000), p. 539

(5). Jesus in history was unique and different from others as he was a Jew and brought up in Jewish culture and tradition. His words and actions were peculiar to his culture and context. His religiosity was born out of his experience of the Father, an experience that was different from his fellow Jews. But the Jews could not understand this. Such a Jesus-paradigm experiencing “God as Father” and expressing it in the *Our Father* is an *a-posteriori* statement. Hence Christian faith expressions or its formulations in Asia should truly come out of the Asian experience,¹³ especially born out of a mission in dialogue. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences emphasizes this aspect of a common search in the wake of the new century especially “by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths.”¹⁴ And the Church is a *pilgrim* Church in this on-going search.

The Office of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith brought out *Dominus Iesus* on August 6, 2000. It was duly ratified and confirmed and ordered for publication by Pope John Paul II on June 16, 2000.¹⁵ The document explicitly mentions that it was intended to reemphasize the *indispensable elements* of Christian doctrine (3) or the central truths of the Catholic Church: (1) that dialogue does not replace but accompanies *missio ad gentes*, towards Church’s mission, and (2) that all are saved through the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ. The document feels that the missionary proclamation was *constantly endangered* (4) by relativistic theories that justify religious pluralism. By holding such theories, the document says that certain truths like the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal

¹³ Michael Amaladoss points out that the very phrase “The Church in Asia” pretends that there is only one universal Church that is present everywhere, refusing to accept the vision that the one universal Church realizes itself in many local Churches so that we can speak about Asian Churches. See, *Jeevadhara*, July 2000: Vol. 30, No. 178, pp. 344-347

¹⁴ “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service,” Final Statement of the Seventh Federation of Asian Bishop’s Conferences Plenary Assembly, Samphan, Thailand, January 3-13, 2000

¹⁵ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html

salvific mediation of the Church, the inseparability of the Kingdom of God and the Church, the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church, etc. are superseded. The document also mentions some of the reasons indicating "certain presuppositions of both a philosophical and theological nature, which hinder the understanding and acceptance of the revealed truth." The document enumerates a few: 1) inexpressibility of divine truth 2) relativistic attitudes toward truth itself 3) the symbolic mentality of the East 4) the subjectivism of reason as the only source of knowledge 5) incarnation of the Eternal Logos reduced to a mere appearing of God in history, and 6) the tendency to read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church. (No. 4)

The document quotes several passages of the Gospel and the Letters of St. Paul and documents like the *Redemptoris Missio* to reiterate the Catholic position regarding revelation. The document completely rejects the notion that the truth about God cannot be grasped and manifested in its globality and completeness by any historical religion, neither by Christianity nor by Jesus Christ. And, on the contrary, the Church holds that the full and complete revelation of the salvific mystery of God is given in Jesus Christ. The obedience of faith implies acceptance of the truth of Christ's revelation. (6) The document differentiates between the Christian *theological faith* (acceptance of the truth revealed by the One and Triune God) and the other religions' *belief* (religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking in assent to God) and admonishes theologians to bear this distinction in mind. Quoting *Nostra aetate* (2) the document repeats that some elements of the Scriptures of other religions *reflect a ray of that truth* which enlightens all. The Church reserves the term *inspired* to only the Christian scriptures; others are customs, practices, and precepts. Their followers receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain. (8)

The document further elaborates on the unicity and universality of salvation in Jesus Christ offered first to the Jews and later to others (pagans), and admonishes the Church to have a firm faith in Christ's salvation for the sake of all. And bearing this in mind, the theologians are invited to explore more deeply the nature of *participatory mediation* of other saviours and *if and in what way* other saviours fall within this divine plan of salvation. (14) The document also states that the emphatic language being used is the sign

of being *faithful to revelation*. (15) Further, the document emphasizes that just as there is only one Christ, there could always be only one Church, which is Christ's body. And that Church *subsists* in the Catholic Church, which has a *historical continuity* and *apostolic succession*. But there could be many elements of sanctification and truth found outside the Catholic Church and they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church. (16) So, the Christian faithful are admonished not to think of the so many ecclesial communities as the *divided* Churches and that there is no more the *real* Church of Christ. "This Church *subsists* in full in the Catholic Church." (17)

The document *Dominus Jesus* says that there is an intimate connection between Christ, the Kingdom of God, and the Church. There could be distinctions between them but they cannot be separated from one another. (18) Other peoples, cultures, and religions may find a common ground in one reality and may be *creation-centred* or *kingdom-centred* or *theo-centred*, but they leave no room or very little room for the Church, which is intimately connected to Christ and God's Kingdom. Some of their beliefs and practices may have good elements in them but they are preparatory for the Gospel. They cannot be held divinely originated or having salvific efficacy by the way they work. (21) They are in fact a *gravely deficient situation*. (22) The Church as the door to heaven is therefore necessary for salvation and Christ is the only mediator. Christ is still the mediator for those who have no visible membership in the Church and the grace flows to them in their own spiritual and material situation through Christ and by *mysterious ways* known only to God. (20) The Document goes to the extent of saying that those belonging to other religions, if they failed to respond to that grace, would not only be denied salvation but also severely judged. (22)

Finally, *Dominus Iesus* would not sacrifice the centrality of Christian truth nor its mission *ad gentes* for the sake of interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue is part of its *evangelizing mission* and is one of the actions of the Church's mission. The document is careful to state that the partners in dialogue are to be treated equally with personal dignity; but this equality does not refer to the doctrinal content of Christian faith, nor does it minimize the position of Jesus Christ in the economy of salvation. The Church is entitled to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through baptism and other sacraments. (22)

As it is clear, *Dominus Iesus* was a document prepared and published in the wake of certain misgivings, misinterpretations, and *plural* thinking in the Church. The Offices for the Doctrine of the Faith wanted to pin down certain essential truths of the Catholic Church and discourage *ad hoc*, free reflections and interpretations regarding these and even indirectly warn those who swayed the Church in the erroneous ways. But no other document of the Church received such criticism as this one because of its derogatory statements, its tone and language, which strained the relationship with sisters and brothers of other religions and of other Churches.

On October 2, 2000, Pope John Paul II had to say that *Dominus Iesus* did not deny salvation to followers of other religions: "This confession does not deny salvation to non-Christians, but points to its ultimate source in Christ, in whom man and God are united." In another statement issued on December 6, Pope John Paul II maintained the Church's position of Vatican II that salvation was available to believers of other faiths: "The Gospel teaches us that those who live in accordance with the Beatitudes - the poor in spirit, the pure of heart, those who bear lovingly the sufferings of life - will enter God's Kingdom." He further added that "All who seek God with a sincere heart, including those who do not know Christ and his Church, contribute under the influence of grace to the building of this Kingdom."¹⁶

Francis A. Sullivan, notable American Catholic theologian and an expert in Ecclesiology, points out to how the term *subsists in* came to be used in the document. A number of bishops observed that the assertion and identification of the Church of Christ with only the Catholic Church¹⁷ was inconsistent with the acknowledged presence of elements of sanctification and truth elsewhere. And this led the Council to redefine that the Church of Christ was no longer *exclusively* the Catholic Church, but continues to exist (*subsists*) in it,¹⁸ averting negative implication of

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II: General Audience on December 6, 2000 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20001206_en.html

¹⁷ As found in the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of Pope Pius X and in the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church* of Vatican II

¹⁸ "The Impact of *Dominus Iesus* on Ecumenism," America, The National Catholic

the previous doctrine of *exclusive identity*. None the less, as Charlotte Allen grieves, the document continues to be the point of tension between the Catholics and the Protestants.¹⁹ A document,²⁰ signed by pastors worldwide such as principals of seminaries, approves *Dominus Iesus* for its clear and convincing presentation. But it criticizes the Roman Catholic Church for its perception of the Gospel according to its own tenets: not surely an attempt at building ecumenism but confronting relativism and establishing the supremacy of the Catholic Church. It rejects totally the Church authoritarianism and monopoly wanting to give space to the Written Word of God as the only true authority, saying that one cannot serve two masters.

The document sparked mixed reactions in India's multicultural setting. On the one hand, there was a welcome at the document's citation of *free theological debate* and *fundamental questions that remain open to further discussion* as a sign of Vatican's openness. It does encourage theological exploration and research to find how other religious experiences *may fall within the divine plan of salvation*. On the other hand, Archbishop Vincent Concessao of Delhi, the Vice-president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), said: "*Dominus Iesus* is immediately relevant to the multi-religious and multi-cultural situation in India but it was felt that the document has to be toned down."²¹ The CBCI advised the bishops to use the document "as they think fit without diluting the faith." The bishops, referring to *sarva dharma samabhava* (to look at all religions with equal attitude), also asserted that "people of different religions can be saved if they sincerely and in good faith follow their

Review, October 28, 2000 <http://americamagazine.org/issue/386/article/impact-dominus-iesus-ecumenism>

¹⁹ <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2005/04/What-Is-Dominus-Iesus-And-Why-Is-Everyone-Mad-About-It.aspx>

²⁰ "Analysis of Dominus Iesus" CWRC, A Christian Witness to Roman Catholicism, in <http://www.cwrc-rz.org/analysisofdi.html>; also in The New Leader, Vol. 114, No. 10, June 1-15, 2001, p. 30

²¹ "Bishops Note Room for Theological Enquiry in toning down *Dominus Iesus*," UCANews.com, May 3, 2001 http://www.ucanews.com/story-archive?post_name=/2001/05/03/bishops-note-room-for-theological-inquiry-in-toning-down-dominus-iesus&post_id=18353

conscience and the will of God known to them.” But the bishops clarified that salvation of non-Christians was accomplished in Jesus Christ in a *mysterious relation* with the Church and was *oriented towards it*. They also affirmed that Jesus Christ is the universal Saviour, “the real and participated source of every saving revelation of God wherever it is found.”²²

Indian theologians would agree with Dr. Vincent Kundukulam,²³ the President of the Pontifical Institute, Aluva, that the document projects an *ambivalent attitude* towards non-Christians: though the document speaks of good elements in other religions as expressions of God’s revelation (8), these are seen in a gravely deficient situation (22) lacking assent to God’s revelation. (7) Generally, the document is considered a step *backward* while considering the tone, language, and content of other similar Vatican documents.²⁴ Theologians like Dr. Felix Wilfred²⁵ feel that the Church should improve its *pedagogy* of dialogue. Tolerance, compassion, and concern for other religions need not be understood as *compromise*. There is a fear in living out the renunciation and kenosis of Jesus and this fear can be taken away to the extent we allow our neighbours to touch us. There is always hope in improving the relationship in the *participatory* model of dialogue, excluding no one.

Concluding Remarks

To quote Schillebeeckx,²⁶ human existence is coexistence. Despite individuality, a person has an essential relation to the others, the fellow human beings. The human face is an image of oneself *for others*, almost predestined for the encounter with other human beings. The Ultimate Reality has a peculiar relationship with this human person. This relationship is mutual and without limits. Human beings experience this

²² Ibid.

²³ Dr. Vincent Kundukulam: “Dominus Jesus and Mission” posted by Nelson MCBS, on June 23, 2002 <http://nelsonmcbs.wordpress.com/2012/06/23/dominus-jesus-and-mission/>

²⁴ To cite a few examples: “In fact it must be firmly believed that” (no 5) “It must be firmly held” (no 7) “all the children of the Church should nevertheless remember that” (no 22), etc.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ David Tracy with Hans Kung and Johann B. Metz, ed. *Toward Vatican III: The work that needs to be done*, Gill and Macmillan, 1978, p. 34

relationship in a limited but genuine way. At the level of personal and collective experience, everything seems true and valid. Correctness or falsehood arises when judged from different standpoints and perspectives. All these are real and experiential. Religious organizations are *human*, basically. Yet they claim divine origin and divine guidance. They can also function in a most unholy manner. And thus dialogue becomes primarily important for self-introspection and self-purification, for learning from and enriching oneself. It helps the human person become wholesome.

The understanding of the ultimate reality varies with religious traditions given their particular time and context. This variation could generate different responses from accommodation to conflict. Their causes lie mostly in their use of literature and language, sometimes poetic and mythical. Asserting one's experience and in the way it is expressed might sound like eliminating all other experiences or considered as pseudo and not genuine. But when there is a further deepening of one's quest in the presence of similar experiences there could be a re-defining, a re-interpretation. And yet, the initial vigour does not diminish, which is the case with every religious tradition or within religious traditions. Hence while asserting a truth the human and the psychological dimensions could also be taken seriously.

It is a fact of experience in a plural religious set up like in Asia/India²⁷ that assertions about religious truths do not become absolute or universal. It is also a fact that those who are involved in interreligious dialogue have a mixed, non-absolutist, non-categorical language to speak, and their experience is one of sharing, complementing, and growing together. Not that they are afraid of proclaiming the truths they believe in, but their dialogical faith-sharing experience itself leads them to an osmosis in which the space is shared in listening, debating, understanding, etc. It is not any more the same identity after dialogue. The identity can be described as *multiple-faith* identity, which could be a theme for further exploration.

²⁷ In Rg Veda, I. 164, 460 we find many names for the One. In Buddhist tradition [Majjhima Nikaya, I. 256f, Digha Nikaya, 2. 64f] the Doctrine of Dependent Origination indicates the pluralism of inter-dependent conditions. In Jain tradition, various viewpoints are possible but none of them can provide final knowledge, and all viewpoints are conditional. (Anekanta and Syadvada).

The Church in India recognizes these days such a faith experience as an outcome of a common religious mingling and, particularly, religious dialogue. But it is also careful to warn its followers not to lose one's faith identity but be rooted in it and in its tradition. This concern could be often seen in the language it uses, 'yes-but'. On the one hand, it would affirm religious freedom of the individual; it would also stress the proclamation of the Gospel as its key mission. The Church would keep within its authority the interpretation of the Word of God, its pastoral and theological methods, and encourage its members to dialogue with other religions and cultures. This kind of attitude of the Church could also arise from an inadequate understanding of the Christian identity of a people in a plural religious and cultural context. In Asia/India, the people for centuries had lived and appropriated a variety of deep-rooted beliefs and cultural practices. Mixed marriages are becoming even more common. Members of the same family may belong to two different faith traditions but come together on religious and other occasions at a pilgrimage site, in a temple, in a church or in a mosque.

Experience reveals that inter-religious live-together has an outcome of an *osmosis* and *communion*, in which one does not recognize oneself as separate from the other. The one is seen as part of the other. In the state of such a communion, there could be an enriched (perhaps changed) identity like that of salt and water. The experiencer could see in oneself the merging of two identities at various levels but will be able to distinguish both. There is still an opening for the Church to reflect on such a 'mixed identity,' and the field of dialogue could be a good source of discovery. A Christian, who is very much in dialogue with the members of other faiths, has a better chance of evolving an adequate model for a Christian theology of religions in Asia/India.

In my reflections, I perceive myself not as an agnostic nor a person indifferent to religions but as one who evaluates human faith-experience in context. In the Asian/Indian context, obviously one would land up in a pluralistic perspective. Experiences are varied but the source is the same. Every experience has a place within the gamut of experiences. Every religion has an identity and a role to play in society. *Person* is a useful metaphor here. Any religion can be compared to a person, whose skills

and characteristics are useful to the society in some way. The person takes up multiple roles given the context and need: father-mother, husband-wife, manager, friend, helper, etc. Similarly, every religion plays its significant role according to the needs and challenges of time and history. Its role definitely shows its identity.

Dialogue experience admirably shows that if one's faith is not reflected in one's life, it loses its meaning. One's own faith should be the first to challenge its own believers. Critical outlook on other religions should follow a better understanding of one's own faith. Hence, the search for one's religious identity through one's own Scriptures and the living traditions is necessary especially in a context of religious rivalry and conflicts. The discovery of the wealth of resources and perspectives in a religious tradition and its disclosure bring about transformation of the mind and cultures. For instance, the prophetic dimension of the Semitic religions can be complemented by the accommodative, introspective charisma of the Indian religious ethos in the pursuit of integral growth and salvation. The FABC gives great hope for the future of dialogical learning and experience: "With our Asian sisters and brothers, we will strive to foster communion among Asian peoples... With them we will explore ways of utilizing the gifts of our diverse religions, cultures and languages to achieve a richer and deeper Asian unity. We build bridges of solidarity and reconciliation with peoples of other faiths and will join hands with everyone in Asia in forming a true community of creation."²⁸

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²⁸ "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life", Final Statement of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly, January 10-19, 1995, Manila, Philippines. See *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Vol. 2, Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, ed. Claretian Publications, Philippines, 1997, p. 8

Concern for the Integral Liberation of the Human Insights of the FABC Documents

Alangaram

Alangaram shows how the theological perspectives on inter-religious relations in the FABC documents move from Christocentrism to theocentrism and further to anthropocentrism (including concern for nature) without diluting the faith in Christ. Dialogue will be effective and credible in Asia only if it takes up issues related to poverty and destruction of environment. Alangaram teaches theology at Arulkadal, Jesuit Regional Theology Centre, Chennai.

Introduction

After proclaiming the Year of Faith from October 11, 2012 to November 24, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI had also announced two significant anniversaries: the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the 20th year of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In the year of faith, all the Catholics must read, reflect and pray over the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church in order to renew our relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and to bear witness to him in our daily life.

The Pope added saying that we are all happy today. We have joy in our hearts, but it is perhaps more sober and humble. Over these fifty years, we have learned and experienced how original sin exists and is translated ever and anew into individual as well as structural sins¹. At this juncture, only the grace of God can free humanity from the snares of individual, social, historical, structural and ecological sins. In the Asian

¹ <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=21238>

context, we can receive that grace through faith that inculturates into Asian cultures, dialogues with Asian religions and liberates the 80% of the Asian people who are poor and oppressed.

There are many trends in the theological understanding of religious pluralism in the last fifty years after Vatican II, especially on the shift from Ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism, from Christocentrism to Theocentrism reaching out to Anthropocentrism. In Asian context Anthropocentrism has been understood as a theological trend that takes the means of inculturation and interreligious dialogue for societal justice and liberation of the Asian poor.

In the name of development, the humans in Asia have exploited to a great extent, water, sand, stone, minerals and other natural wealth and ruined the mother earth. Any harm done to nature, mostly affects first the poor and then all other humans as well. We need to remember that humans cannot live without nature but nature can live without humans. When the Church works for individual conversion and societal transformation (Anthropocentrism), it needs to be inclusive of Ecocentrism as well. Her obligation for the poor will be incomplete if there is no place for Ecocentrism in all her ministries of salvation/liberation.

Biblical Revelation of Anthropocentrism

The word anthropocentrism needs further explanation to be true to the Biblical revelation. In the saving mission of God, revealed through all the prophets, and finally the prophet of prophets, Jesus Christ the Son of God, there is always a focus on the *anawim* (Ps 9: 18; 147: 6; Prv 3: 34; Is 29: 19; 61: 1-4; Zech 2: 3; Mt 5: 3-12; Jas 2: 1-9; Lk 14: 7-14). God in God's wisdom plans to save all, but being always on the side of the poor and the oppressed. This is the way or the strategy God has chosen, as it has been revealed to us in the book of Exodus, and in all the books of the Bible.

God's option for the poor in God's salvific economy is a covenant of God's option for anthropocentrism. This God sees the affliction of the oppressed, hears their cry, concentrates on the ways in which they are oppressed and who are all responsible for such dehumanizing oppression.

The preferential option for the poor somehow was forgotten in the history of the Church. However it got the attention of the universal Church since Vatican II. Drawing inspiration from the Vatican II and becoming true to the Biblical revelation, the bishops, theologians and Christians in Asia have further developed the option in their own context.

Their theological reflections are unique because their Asian context is unique. The context is unique because there are 80% of its people are poor who belong to different cultures and religions. Since the majority are poor, we need to raise a number of questions: How are they made poor and kept illiterate and oppressed? In what way their cultures and religions are responsible in making them what they are today? Do their cultures and religions in any way a source of inspiration for the Asians and to protest and struggle against their poverty and oppression? What are the structures and who are the persons responsible for their poverty and oppression?

Asian context of the Poor and their Poverty

What is poverty? How do Asian bishops and theologians understand it in their context? They understand poverty as economic deprivation.² The Asian bishops do not spiritualise the term poverty, as some others do in Asia. They are straightforward in defining it as follows: "by poverty, (they) understand (conscious of other definitions which may be given to it) to be deprived of access to a full sharing in human brotherhood"³. It is a state of forced, violent and man-made life-condition or a life-situation where the poor are deprived⁴ of access to goods, means and opportunities to live and lead a dignified human life as the children of God. The poor are deprived through a process of injustice and oppression. The oppression

² Gaudencio B. Rosales, and C.G. Arevalo, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, eds. (Philippines: Claretion Publication, 1992), p. 207, No. 2. The social analysis of the situation revealed to the bishops that there is in Asia "the vast dimensions of hunger, disease, malnutrition and unemployment. We (the bishops) have seen how millions of our Asian brethren are living below the poverty line." The FABC documents from 1970 to 1991 have been published in this book. Henceforth ref. FABC,

³ FABC, 143, No. 1.

⁴ Arevalo, p. 199, No. 2. While explaining the word 'deprivation' the bishops say: "We use the word 'deprived' deliberately. Our people are deprived of the goods and opportunities to which they have a right because they are oppressed."

is kept intact and maintained by a minority of powerful people or groups "under economic, social, and political structures which have injustice built into them"⁵. The situation in which they live is man-made and not God-made situation. It is the conviction of the bishops that the poor will become poorer⁶, unless efforts are made to change the existing economic systems.⁷

We cannot accuse God of any injustice. We have received a revelation from the prophets (O.T) and from Jesus (N.T). They say that God is just (Deut 32: 4; Ps 9: 16; Lk 18: 7-8) good (Mt 19: 17), merciful (Lk: 15). God who created this world "saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1: 31). He cannot make it bad. Our common sense dictates to us that a God who created 'the good things and good beings' also must be good. Such a good God cannot create some persons rich and others poor and be the root cause of injustice and oppression⁸. He cannot give more goods and opportunities to a few nations and make other nations suffer deprivation and injustice. If we believe in a Good God who sent his prophets and finally His son Jesus, we have a duty to find out the reasons, in terms of persons and systems which are responsible for the deprivation and oppression of the millions of our people and liberate them.⁹ In the process of conscientization and liberation, this will enable the poor, to take back the power and authority which are theirs.

⁵ Ibid., p. 199, No. 2.

⁶ Ibid. "It would appear that due to the present economic systems the disparities between the rich and the poor may not only continue, but may even widen, so that some of the poor might become still poorer with the years."

⁷ Ibid., p. 336, No. 4: "Local economies are caught up in a global economy that exercises excessive and aggressive trade exchanges which suck out much of Asia's assets. Thus economic structures are characterised by dependence, exploitation of cheap labour, destruction of natural resources and the environment, unfair prices in trade."

⁸ Alangaram. A, *Christ of the Asian Peoples Towards an Asian Contextual Christology* Based on the documents of Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences, Revised Edition (Bangalore: Asian Trading corporation, 2001), p. 30.

⁹ "The impact of Tourism: Final Reflections of the Joint Ecumenical Workshop" FABC Papers, (1989), p. 24: "We believe that those who truly hunger for God's truth and righteousness are infused with the same historical power that brought Jesus back from the grave. ... Through this faith, we attempt to subvert the evil structures of the powerful through a sincere and unfeigned identification with the struggles of the poor and the victims."

The leaders of the universal Roman Catholic Church (the bishops), acknowledge poverty as a man-made situation or a man-made 'order', and proclaim to the whole world: "Unless combated and overcome by social and political action, the influence of the new industrial and technological order favours the concentration of wealth, power and decision-making in the hands of a small public or private controlling group. Economic injustice and lack of social participation keep a man from attaining his basic human and civil rights."¹⁰

Thus, keeping the poor and the oppressed at the centre of their mission and to save/liberate them, the Asian bishops and theologians move from Ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism and Theocentrism to Anthropocentrism which is inclusive of Ecocentrism. In other words, God, Christ and his Church are all seen and understood in the process of saving/liberating the poor and oppressed in Asia. Moreover the salvation of the people of the middle and rich classes will depend on the degree in which they get involved in God's mission of saving/liberating the poor and the oppressed in Asia.

From Ecclesiocentrism to Anthropocentrism

The Church in Asia is a minority. The faithful are less than 3% of the total population. Without any dispute or hesitation she needs the help of all other people who belong to different religions and cultures in Asia to bring God's Reign in the midst of Asians.

When we keep the poor and oppressed of Asia at the centre of our theological concern, the biblical God, Jesus Christ whom God sent, and the Church who follows him, have their relevant and meaningful place in Asia. The poor in Asia accept the God who liberated the oppressed from Egypt from the hands of the oppressors, listen to the Good News of Jesus who had compassion for the poor and laid down his life for them, and the poor in Asia welcome the Church that serves them and bears witness to Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, More Post Conciliar Documents, ed. (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1982), II, 696. Henceforth all the references from this volume will have only the name of the document and number and when there is no number then the corresponding page. *Convenientes ex universo*, p. 697.

Although the openness of the Church to other religions can be found in the early history of the Church, even in the time of Justin Martyr, somehow in the course of history she lost her original vision and the sense of dialogue with other religions. Instead of dialogue, she decided to dominate and rule, and even went as far as destroying other religions. This unfortunate attitude to other religions is similar to that of the western colonial powers.

Being liberated from the wrong notion of other religions, the Church today officially declares to the whole world that the other religions are a worthy enterprise and that she has to enter into dialogue with them. This change of attitude in her thinking is due to the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit of Christ (FABC, 258). This is a *Copernican Revolution* after Vatican II in the attitude and approach of the Church to other religions and their followers.¹¹ This changed attitude enables the Asian bishops to seek together with the brothers and sisters of other religions, that fullness of Christ which is God's plan for the whole of creation.

The bishops say that dialogue with the great, living religious traditions of Asia "should be the ideal form of evangelisation ..." (FABC, 94). They draw inspiration from Vatican Council II. Interreligious dialogue is a mandate given by the universal Church to all her sons and daughters.¹² The Church in Asia receives it with immense joy and happiness as she finds herself in the midst of sisters and brothers of many religions and cultures. In their faith experience, the bishops themselves are convinced that it is God who "encourages us to enter into dialogue with the peoples of other religions in Asia" (FABC, 292). Dialogue is the way through which God calls the Church to bear witness to Christ in a plurireligious world.

The Catholic Church also advocates her children that they, in their "witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these people, as well as the values in their society and culture"¹³. This is the foundation for the Church in Asia who calls these believers, not 'non-Christians' but as 'Brothers

¹¹ *Nostra Aetate*, No. 2. "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions."

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

and Sisters' of other Asian faiths a phrase comes often in the FABC documents. To continue the mission of Christ in Asia will involve "a being with the people, as Jesus was: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1: 14) ... (and means especially) a dialogue with Asia's poor, with its local cultures and with other religious traditions ..." (FABC, 280).

Asia is "the cradle for all the great world religions ..." (Arevalo, 230). The majority of the population is God-believing and God-fearing. They do not happen to be poor but they are historically made poor, and are exploited by the nations of affluence in collaborations with the local elite and the rich. As a result we have a disrupted and disruptive economic order that makes the rich, richer and the poor, poorer. The bishops are aware of this, which is against God's plan as it destroys the image of God in the poor. Hence they, on the one hand, appeal to the Churches in the affluent nations that they should "use their influence in bringing about an economic order in which the demands of justice in the developing world are met" (FABC, 156), and on the other hand, they invite all the Christians in Asia to enter into dialogue with the brothers and sisters of other faiths in order that the Reign of God may come.

In a context of poverty and oppression, the Church's witnessing word cannot be but prophetic. The degree of prophetic life and action can be testified to the extent to which she involves herself in liberating the poor and oppressed. For this she enters into dialogue with the millions of Asian people and as such dialogue is "intrinsic to the very life of the Church, and the essential mode of all evangelisation" (FABC, 111). The Church's evangelizing activity will take many forms, but in Asia she cannot have a better means of bearing witness to Christ than engaging herself in activities of "integral human development and witnessing to justice, as well as to interreligious dialogue" (FABC, 98).

From Christocentrism to Anthropocentrism

In dialogue with other religions, the claim of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ has presented a problem while some theologians argue that it is not a problem for the Christians in Asia in the context of dialogue.¹⁴ It is also being said that the Church takes refuge "in a more

¹⁴ Michael Amaladoss, "Interreligious Dialogue: A View from Asia," *Landas Journal of Loyola School of Theology*, VIII (July 1994), p. 216. "The uniqueness of Christ

convenient kind of uniqueness which she spells out in terms of the theandric (God-Man Saviour) model which makes no sense in many of our cultures where it often evokes the image of one of the many cosmic forces rather than of a Personal and Absolute Creator-Redeemer. Moreover, this model, utterly untranslatable into some Asian languages, suffers also from an ontology before which soteriology (concern for salvation/liberation) fades out into insignificance".¹⁵ Some others say that this problem is fabricated by the West.¹⁶ Christians in Asia are aware that similar 'Uniqueness claims' in some form or other exist in other religions too.¹⁷ However the bishops in Asia do not make any compromise in their faith "on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the one mediator of God's salvation in history" (FABC, XXI).

If every religion begins to discuss this issue there will be no end to it. This discussion will not help the believers, for the existing trend in the religious scene in Asia is to reject "an exclusive claim of any religious tradition as far as ultimate truths are concerned"¹⁸. A point that can help bring all religions together is the attitude of Jesus who made God known. Making God known, doing God's will and establishing God's Reign is the aim of the mission of Jesus and should be the aim of all Christians¹⁹.

The 'uniqueness claim' of religions should by no means create an atmosphere to divide the poor who belong to different faiths and cultures. As far as the Church is concerned, it needs to commit itself positively²⁰ to the cause of the poor in uniting them and liberating them. Only in such

is often presented as a burning issue in the context of dialogue. I think that in Asia the person and role of Christ is not a problem. The real problem is the attempt of the Church to monopolize Christ." (Ibid)

¹⁵ Aloysius Pieris, "Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions: An Asian Paradigm" *Voices from the Third World*, XV (December 1992), p. 186.

¹⁶ Jacob Kavunkal, "Ministry and Mission, Christological Considerations," *Vidyajyoti*, LVI (December 1992), p. 650. "The uniqueness of Jesus Christ has become a key issue of discussion especially in the Western missiological circles."

¹⁷ Israel Selvanayagam, "Who is this Jesus? A Biblical outline for clearer self-understanding and communication in a multi-faith context," *Asia Journal of Theology*, VII (October 1993), pp. 235-36: "For example, those who read the Bhagavad Gita will not find the 'I am' saying of Jesus as unique. Krishna makes similar claims and more to assert that he is the essence of everything seen and unseen."

¹⁸ Kavunkal, p. 649.

¹⁹ Alangaram, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*, p. 183.

²⁰ Pieris, pp.183-88.

a project of liberation, “simply by being together and working together in a spirit of love” (FABC, 258) can the Church proclaim the unique God of Liberation, who saves all in Jesus Christ, through the liberation of the poor and oppressed²¹.

In this regard the bishops are open more fully to engage themselves in the common task wherein all men and women of goodwill (FABC, 255) “must be joined, of building up within our nations, societies which respond to the deepest aspirations of our peoples as well as to the demands of the Gospel: societies grounded on truth, guided by justice, motivated by charity, realised in freedom, and flowering in peace” (FABC, 5). It can be realised in our ways of proclaiming Jesus in Asia: a) by inviting the sisters and brothers of other religions to worship God in Spirit and Truth (Jn 1: 14; 1: 17; 4: 23-24; 14: 6), b) in washing the feet of the poor and oppressed in service (Jn 13: 3-5), c) in losing one’s life for the other, especially for the poor and the oppressed (Lk 9: 24), and d) in forgiving the enemies, especially the enemies of the poor and the oppressed (Lk 23: 34).

Whatever may be the reason for the emerging trend of fundamentalism in India or Asia, the outcome of it are hatred, religious fighting and violence that leads to destruction of property and loss of life. When such a situation arises, the bishops and followers of Jesus adopt the means of dialogue “with the scriptural imperative of overcoming evil with good” (FABC, 309). As a result they see concretely the increasing co-operation not only among the Churches but especially from the brothers and sisters of other faiths with the common task of transforming Asia.

Positively speaking every religion can contribute from its unfathomable richness and enlighten every person with what is good and sacred, even those who belong to a different religion or culture. This will be the test of every religion irrespective of the claim it makes that it is the only or one among the many religions leading people to God: “the winning characteristic of a religion is the goods it delivers, namely the quality of life that it enables its followers to lead, rather than the doctrine it proclaims”²² or the various claims it makes justifying its existence. In this context, the role of the Church will be to dialogue with other religions

²¹ Alangaram, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*, p. 183.

²² Kavunkal, p. 642.

and serve mankind by revealing the unconditional love and ever saving mercy of God made manifest in Jesus Christ the Saviour. In this regard the bishops express their regret and feel that they "have been found wanting" (FABC, 5).

From Theocentrism to Anthropocentrism

The mystery of incarnation (Jn 1: 14) is "God's self-expression"²³. It is a paradigm par excellence in the Asian context where the majority of the population is socio-politically oppressed and made economically poor. The mystery of God becoming a poor man in the person of Jesus is an expression of God's solidarity with the poor and their suffering.²⁴ In Jesus, the Trinitarian God is not only for the poor and with the poor, but God Himself has become poor (Lk 2: 7). In this mystery of God becoming poor, what is revealed to us is God's willingness and readiness to share his divine life with us²⁵ and his generosity to become one with our traditions and cultures with the aim of saving all of humanity. Facing the varied challenges and problems of Asia, reading the signs of the times and discerning the action of the God of history in Asian realities, the bishops articulate their faith thus: "This is the context of God's creative, incarnational and redemptive action, the theatre in which the drama of Asia's salvation is enacted" (FABC, 275).

Jesus Christ, the man from Galilee, the Son of God, is the centre and foundation of Christian faith. It is in this Jesus that God has become a member of the human family in history. It is through Jesus that all are

²³ Francesca Aran Murphy, *Christ The Form Of Beauty* (Edinburg: T and T Clark, 1995), p. 144.

²⁴ Chung-Choon Kim, "God's Suffering in Man's Struggle," In: *Living Theology in Asia*, ed. John C England (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1981), p. 15: "... the evangelists tell us that Christ identifies himself with the sinners, the tax-collectors, the down-trodden, the imprisoned, the oppressed, the prostitute and the poor. This is the mystery of the Incarnation, in which the powerful God becomes the weakest, and the richest the poorest. In Christ, God identifies himself with the sufferer".

²⁵ Choan-Seng Song, *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 290: "From the Christian point of view, we have to say that God is the missionary par excellence. God initiated 'the mission of the incarnation', the mission of the Word-become-flesh, the mission of God's sharing God's own self with the world."

invited to become children of God.²⁶ Such an invitation from God has its consequence and fulfilment in human life. The way of fulfilment is to follow and carry His Cross who is the 'Word made flesh' and dying and rising with him.

God's Inculturation in Asia

The bishops, in their faith reflections, acknowledge that it was the Trinitarian God who took initiative to enter into dialogue with humanity for its salvation and in the process of divine inculturation, the point of culmination was "when he uttered his Word in a very concrete historical²⁷ situation" (FABC, 94). This Word of God today is active and operative in the world, encountering different traditions, cultures, and religions of people, "transforming them in the power of the Spirit" (FABC, 138) in order that they all be purified, renewed and saved according to the salvific plan of God: "From all eternity God has spoken His message to mankind, to make the power of His Word rule over the individual and social life of man. This eternal message of God became incarnate in Jesus who announced the Good News of God's Reign in this world" (FABC, 115). God himself in his eternal wisdom of salvation has chosen 'inculturation', a process of salvation: "Inculturation is a dialogical encounter process understood in its deepest meaning that comes from the salvific movement of the Triune God, ..." (FABC, 138): Thus, God uttered his Word in human history and this Word encounters every human person, every society and nation with their unique cultures and religions and transforms them all, through the salvific power of the Spirit. Therefore, the aim of 'inculturation' of the Trinitarian God is the transformation of individuals and society from sin and all its consequences²⁸.

God's Dialogue through His Son in Asia

To see God as he is, or to meet or speak to him, is something impossible and incomprehensible for us human beings. But what is

²⁶ Arevalo, p. 341, No. 28: "In Jesus, God has personally entered human history and has become a member of the human race. This total identification with us of the Son of God is ordained to sharing with us his Sonship of the Father."

²⁷ By 'historical' the bishops mean here "in time and space".

²⁸ Alangaram, A, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*, P. 79.

impossible for us is made possible in and through Jesus Christ²⁹, the Son of God (Mt 3: 17; 14: 33; 16: 16; 17: 5; 27: 54; Mk 1: 11; 9: 7; Lk 3: 22; 9: 35; Jn 1: 34; 3: 16; 11: 4; 17: 1). In Jesus Christ, God himself has come to us and has entered into dialogue with us.³⁰

The purpose of God's dialogue through his Son is to share with us God's gift of salvation, revealing that God is love (I John 4: 8, 16). We are invited to love God in our neighbour and to communicate the same love through action (doing good to the neighbour), always conscious of our origin which is Love itself (God). God is our Father and we are all his children. This is the reason why, in all the documents of FABC, the bishops call the members of other faiths, "brothers and sisters". Such an understanding of the members of other faiths leads the bishops to a deeper commitment. The poor, whom they want to serve, belong not only to the Christian communities but to all faiths. Therefore "the struggle for a human life is not confined to the Christian community" (FABC, 179). Such a re-reading of the problem of the poor leads the bishops to understand the plan of the Trinitarian God for all the Asian peoples in whose midst He lives and is pleased when the faces of the poor are re-created.³¹

The integrity of Jesus in what he said and did brings him suffering and death. In their commitment to the cause of transformation of the Asian society, the Asians will have to do hard work, make sacrifices, face suffering³² and even death. But the resurrection of Jesus is a sign of hope³³. Although the liberation program in Asia has to undergo the test of time, the ultimate victory is ours.

²⁹ *Nuntius*, "Synodus Episcoporum Coetus Specialis Pro Asia", Vatican City, 1998, p. 7: "In Jesus Christ, the unknown and inaccessible God fully reveals and communicates Himself."

³⁰ Arevalo, p.141, No. 3; p. 344, No. 40: "In Christ God has entered into a dialogue with human beings, offering them salvation."

³¹ Arevalo, p. 179, No. 3.0.2: "We seek the full flowering of the human person and the transformation of the world of Asia into that which pleases the Creator (cf. Gen 1)."

³² Alangaram, A, *Religions for Societal Transformation* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2006), pp. 73 and 99: "The commandment of Jesus, 'Do this in my memory' should enable and infuse us with his courage to suffer for a just cause ..."

³³ *Ibid.* p. 74

In His dialogue, through His Son, with the humans, God has poured out His Spirit upon all (Acts 2,: 17). The bishops, in their dialogue with the other creeds, cults and codes, observe that these are the “diverse ways of responding to God whose Spirit is active in all peoples and cultures” (FABC, 310), and the same “Spirit who leads us into all truth (Jn 16: 13)” (FABC, 310). It is the Spirit of God who invites us all to enter into dialogue with one another and search together for the truth. The bishops invite all to be open to the Spirit who inspires people to proclaim.

The dialogue of God with humanity is the foundation for our interreligious dialogue and its goal in Asia. If it leads us to love one another, present the liberating word and action of God and learn from one another to do good and transform the Asian community, then our dialogue is purposeful and meaningful.³⁴

God's Option for the Poor in Asia

The special option of God for the poor was a revelation in the Old Testament. He chose Moses to liberate the oppressed people in Egypt. His promise of liberation was proclaimed through different prophets in different times. Finally, Jesus, the option of God for the marginalised of the Earth, has been confirmed as the covenant of God with the poor. Jesus has pitched his tent with the poor and will liberate them in human history³⁵. It is thus: “The story of God's public agreement with the poor to embark on the common task of transforming this world into the new heaven and earth, that God and the poor are dreaming of together, is a story the Asians would never refuse to hear; and it is the story that Christians fear to narrate. And yet that story is Jesus.”³⁶

Anthropocentrism inclusive of Ecocentrism

In our Christian traditions, especially after Vatican II, the mission of inculturation and interreligious dialogues are not ends in themselves. They are just means or instruments to liberate the poor. When we journey through them towards integrated human liberation which includes today eco-liberation as well, the Reign of God will come and flourish in our

³⁴ Alangaram. A, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*, P. 81.

³⁵ *Ibid.* ³⁶ Pieris, p.187.

midst. In this journey, Asian Church should adopt two kinds of approaches. One is centrifugal and the other is centripetal.

The centrifugal approach is instrumental in forming the local Christian Communities of the poor and oppressed with equality and brotherhood. The foundation for such communities is Jesus Christ who is the way to heavenly Father, lover of nature, teacher of liberation and redemption and the symbol of unity. Faith that does justice could only be actualized when Christians from local Churches, following Jesus, generously give their life for the poor, the oppressed and the crucified nature.

Centripetal involvement is working among the poor and the oppressed outside the local churches. Jesus who was filled with Holy Spirit (Lk 4:8) started his journey of liberation by relating to the downtrodden and respecting their humanness. If Asian Church sincerely follow Jesus they should give a special care to the poor and oppressed as well as to the crucified environment, and save them, so that they rise from the state of deprivation and march to the state of fulfillment. The centripetal approach demands the local Christian churches to take side with the movements of the poor, agricultural coolies, Adivasis, women, fisher folk, the oppressed and the environmentalists and participate in their struggle for justice. By this the poor and oppressed are able to decide for themselves and to live with respect, dignity and fullness. The ecological system will be liberated from the clutches of individual, historical, structural, social and ecological sins. This is the plan of God for Nature and the poor in Asia.

To achieve this integral liberation with the help of faith and Christian tradition that does justice, the Asian Church should continuously be involved in interreligious dialogue and get rooted in our cultures. Such an involvement will bring an ecological integrity with socio-economic justice through constructive human actions, social equality and balance.

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“Paradigms” and “Models” for a Christian Theology of Religions

A Study of Jacques Dupuis’ Perspectives

Mathew W. I. Dunn

Matthew W.I. Dunn examines the writings of Jacques Dupuis focussing on the definition of and distinction between “Paradigm” and “Model”, advanced by Jacques Dupuis in his proposal of a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism. He describes Dupuis’ treatment of a variety of paradigms and models, especially the argument for the overall suitability of a Christocentric view. Some critical observations are made regarding some of Dupuis’ choices amongst the paradigms as well as the ultimate usefulness of this distinction. Matthew W.I. Dunn teaches theology at Caldwell College, New Jersey and Marywood University Scranton, Pennsylvania, USA.

The Belgian priest Jacques Dupuis (1923–2004) was a theologian and member of the Society of Jesus. Beginning in 1948, he spent thirtysix years of his life assigned to the Society’s mission in India, mostly teaching at the theological colleges in Kurseong and Delhi. He later described his experience of India’s cultural and religious diversity as “the greatest grace I received from God as far as my vocation as a theologian and a professor.”¹

Based on his encounter with a largely non-Christian society, Dupuis felt compelled to revise the theological prejudices with which he had arrived in India, especially in regard to the revelatory and salvific value

¹ Jacques Dupuis, “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27/4 (October 2003): 169.

of non-Christian religions. He decided that humanity's religions "did not represent primarily the search of people . . . for God . . . but the search of God for them."² The non-Christian religions are "gifts" from God which have a positive and favourable significance within His plan of salvation. The question then becomes how to combine that belief with Christianity's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Universal Saviour.³ The whole of his scholarly work thereafter - and, especially his magnum opus, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* - was devoted to showing how these two affirmations were not in fact incompatible, but were rather complementary.⁴

This article will cover Dupuis' arguments for Christianity's need to experience a shift in theological perspective towards other religions. It will describe Dupuis' important distinction between "Paradigm" and "Model", summarizing his own discussion of several paradigms (viz., Ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism, and Theocentrism) which have been

² Ibid., 170.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cf. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997); abbreviated hereafter as, *TCTRP*.

Dupuis became something of a *cause célèbre* when it was learned that in 1998 the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, or CDF, had opened an investigation on this book. The end result was an official "Notification" (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Notification on the Book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* [Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1997], by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J.;" available from the Holy See at: <www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html>). In that Notification, the CDF alleged "notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points, which could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions." The CDF had intervened in order to avoid "the serious confusion and misunderstanding which could result" due to some of the "ambiguous statements and insufficient explanations" found in *TCTRP* (CDF, "Notification on *TCTRP* by Jacques Dupuis," Preface). The Notification was presented to Dupuis who—at the request of the Jesuit Superior General, Rev. Hans Kolvenbach—signed it. Dupuis' own analysis of the affair and of the CDF's claims against his book has been published posthumously. See: Jacques Dupuis, "CDF Process and Notification and My Perspectives on Them," in *Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition: Two Essays by Jacques Dupuis on "Dominus Iesus" and the Roman Investigation of His Work*, ed. William R. Burrows, 74–102 (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

either utilized or proposed for a Christian view of the *religious other*. Moreover, it will look at his treatment of some of the models which have arisen, either as substitutes to the aforementioned paradigms or as corollaries to them (e.g., Reality-centredness; Regnocentrism/Soteriocentrism; Logocentrism; and, Pneumatocentrism). Finally, I will offer a few brief observations on Dupuis' treatment of what is a "Paradigm" and what is a "Model".

Paradigms and Models

Dupuis intentionally uses the concept of "Paradigm" in opposition to "Model", declaring: "The distinction . . . is an important one."⁵ Paradigms, he explains, consist of "principles of understanding, of overall keys of interpretation of reality which, being mutually opposed, exclude each other." Hence, if a paradigm becomes inoperative, one must abandon it and shift to another. Models express aspects of reality without, however, claiming to define that reality in any adequate or distinctive way. Consequently, they are not necessarily exclusive of each other, and can be combined in a complementary fashion in order to yield a more comprehensive view.⁶

As regards Christianity's own relationship with the world's religions, he identifies three paradigms: Ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism, and Theocentrism.⁷

From Ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism

Dupuis categorically rejects any value to the ecclesiocentric paradigm in which "salvation [is] . . . available to people only through faith in Jesus Christ explicitly professed in the Church."⁸ On the contrary:

[Jesus and the Church] are not, and can never be, placed on one and the same level. Jesus Christ alone is . . . the mediator between God and human beings. . . . Whatever role may have to be attributed

⁵ *TCTRP*, 181

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *TCTRP*, 182–83 (cf. also p. 184). Dupuis admits his debt to J. Peter Schineller for this threefold division of paradigms. See: J. Peter Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *Theological Studies* 37/4 (December 1976): 545–66.

⁸ *TCTRP*, 183.

to the Church in the order of salvation, it can never be placed on a par with . . . Christ; nor can the same necessity ever be attributed to it. . . . The Church, as a derived mystery and utterly relative to the mystery of Christ, cannot be the yardstick by which the salvation of others is measured.⁹

A Christian theology of religions needs to “de-centre” itself from the Church and to re-centre on Jesus Christ, substituting instead “[a] broad Christocentric perspective . . . for a narrow ecclesiocentric approach.”¹⁰

From Christocentrism to Theocentrism

Still, Dupuis notes that “for many authors today, not only the ecclesiocentric perspective but the Christocentric one as well appears untenable; it must be replaced by a theocentric worldview.”¹¹ He continues:

In the theocentric perspective . . . God alone stands at the center. “Pluralism” refers to the substitution of many “ways” or saving figures leading to God-the-Center, in place of the one, universal, constitutive mediation of Jesus Christ. The various religions . . . represent as many ways leading to God . . . having the same validity and equal value.¹²

⁹ TCTRP, 185.

¹⁰ TCTRP, 185–186. Commenting on the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, Dupuis had written three decades earlier:

The [Second Vatican Council] has taught us to think of the Church as the humble pilgrim people of God, totally Christ-centred, and this ‘de-centration’ of the Church is more fundamental for a true renewal than *decentralization* in the Church (J. Dupuis, “The Christocentrism of Vatican II,” *Clergy Monthly* 31/10 [October 1967]: 363; emphasis in original).

This essay and its sequel (cf. *Clergy Monthly*, vol. 32, 1968) were reproduced in: James [Jacques] Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Theological Approaches* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1977), 33–58.

¹¹ TCTRP, 183.

¹² TCTRP, 186. What does Dupuis mean by calling Jesus the “constitutive” Mediator of salvation? He means that the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s Death and Resurrection has a universal significance: It seals a bond of union between God and humanity that can never be broken; it represents the privileged channel through which God has chosen to share His divine life with men and women (p. 305; cf. also pp. 283, 303, 387–88).

While not requiring Christians to abandon their faith in Jesus, Theocentrists do require that they abandon their attribution of a universal significance and constitutive role to Him in the plan of salvation. While someone might have encountered God in Jesus, they argue, that does not make Jesus the obligatory way for everyone. Someone's belief that he or she is saved through Jesus does not necessarily make Him the Saviour for everyone. Other salvific paths might exist, thus making Him unnecessary for others.¹³ Dupuis, though, is very clear in rejecting this shift. He declares:

The Christocentrism of Christian tradition is not . . . opposed to theocentrism. It never places Jesus Christ in the place of God; it merely affirms that God has placed [Jesus] at the center of his saving plan . . . not as the end but as the way, not as the goal of every human quest for God but as the universal mediator of God's saving action toward people.¹⁴

He adds:

Christian theology . . . is theocentric by being Christocentric and vice versa. . . . Jesus Christ is the medium of God's encounter with human beings. . . . In him . . . God's saving action reaches out to people in various ways.¹⁵

A paradigm alone based on Jesus as God's incarnate Word can account persuasively for His universal salvific mediatorship. Theocentrism fails because "the . . . theocentric *model*" postulates a Christology which questions and ultimately disavows such an affirmation. Only "the . . . Christocentric *model* of a theology of religions" clearly affirms Christ as the personal Son of God (emphasis added).¹⁶

Some Correlative Models

Dupuis categorizes several more classes, which he calls "models". They are: "Reality-centredness"; Regnocentrism; Logocentrism; and, Pneumatocentrism.¹⁷ The "Reality-centred" approach can be by-passed.¹⁸

¹³ *TCTRP*, 190 (cf. also pp. 183, 186). ¹⁴ *TCTRP*, 191.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* ¹⁶ *Ibid.* (cf. also p. 297). ¹⁷ *TCTRP*, 184.

¹⁸ Dupuis has in mind the approach proposed by John Hick: cf. e.g. John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville, Ky.:

Regnocentrism proposes that all religions essentially profess and pursue (albeit, differently) a message of salvation (*sōteria*) and liberation which - in Christian parlance - is called: the "Kingdom of God" (*regnum Dei*). Each religion should be evaluated by how it contributes to human beings' attainment of that Kingdom and its values.¹⁹ But, Dupuis counters that, although "the Reign of God model is intended . . . as a new version of the theocentric *model*" (emphasis added), it does not truly represent a paradigm shift from the Christological paradigm, for "the Reign of God has broken through to history in Jesus Christ." It is through the Risen Christ that all people, including non-Christians, are called to and share in that Reign. Regnocentrism and Christocentrism are, then, two aspects of the same reality, rather than distinct paradigms.²⁰

Next, Dupuis takes note of frameworks which give the primacy to the active, salvific presence of God's Word or *Logos* as per the Gospel of John, chapter 1 ("Logocentrism") or to God's Holy Spirit ("Pneumatocentrism"). While conceding the universal and historical presence of the Word before the Incarnation (cf. John 1:1–4 and v. 9), Dupuis replies that "this anticipated presence and action . . . do not . . . prevent the New Testament from seeing in the Word incarnate, of whom . . . the Johannine Gospel also speaks (1:14), the universal Savior of humankind."²¹ Logocentrism and Christocentrism are not, therefore, mutually opposed, since each one calls for the other in a unique

Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). According to Hick, all religions function to transform human beings from self-centredness to centredness on the divine "Reality," however conceived (cf. pp. 134–36 *passim*). Nevertheless, both here and in other places Dupuis merely *describes* Hick's views (see *TCTRP*, 194; cf. also pp. 187–89 and 257–59). Presumably, Dupuis was unsympathetic to Hick's "Reality-centred" approach. But, since he never overtly engages or evaluates Hick's arguments, I can only surmise what his opinion might have been.

¹⁹ *TCTRP*, 194. Dupuis has in mind here: Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, with a foreword by Harvey Cox (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 89–92 *passim*, 108–41 *passim*. Knitter now calls his proposal, the "Mutuality Model": see *idem*, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), esp. pp. 109–69.

²⁰ *TCTRP*, 194–95. ²¹ *TCTRP*, 196.

dispensation. They form then “one indivisible reality”. The anticipatory action of the *Logos*, however, is geared towards the Christ-event in which God’s salvific plan has come to its climax.²²

As for the Spirit-centred approach, Dupuis accepts that the Holy Spirit has acted distinctly throughout history before and after the Christ-event. But, he holds that the work of the Spirit and of Christ are “complementary and inseparable.” Pneumatocentrism cannot be separated from Christocentrism, for the Spirit’s active presence before Christ was directed towards Him as the centre of humankind’s salvation. He writes:

The Spirit is the “point of entry” of God’s self-communication . . . but at one and the same time, the Spirit of Christ, communicated . . . in virtue of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. The cosmic influence of the Spirit cannot be severed from the universal action of the risen Christ. His saving function consists in “centering” people . . . on the Christ whom God has established as the mediator and the way [to God].²³

The Spirit makes people sharers in Christ’s Paschal Mystery, thus actuating the Christ-event through all times. “The Spirit gives expression to the operative presence of God’s saving action which has come to a climax in Jesus Christ.” Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism are, then, two complementary and inseparable aspects of the same salvific economy.²⁴

Observations

Dupuis’ Definition and Rejection of Ecclesiocentrism

Dupuis advocates as both a practical and theoretical necessity the shift from a Church-centred to a Christ-centred paradigm in the theology

²² Ibid.

²³ TCTRP, 197.

²⁴ Ibid. Dupuis finds support for this opinion in Vatican II’s “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”: Since Christ died for everyone, and since the ultimate calling of each of us comes from God and is . . . a universal one, we . . . hold that the holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in [Christ’s] paschal mystery in a manner known to God (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22; cf. Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2 [London and Washington, D.C.]: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990], 1082).

of religions. I agree with him that the Church cannot be substituted for God. I also agree that the Church does not exist in and of herself, but as a derived mystery, completely related to and reliant upon Jesus Christ, her founder. But, I find Dupuis' statement regarding what Ecclesiocentrism is (viz., salvation only through the explicit profession of faith in Christ in the Church) to have been formulated in a highly questionable manner. Which person or group holds to such an Ecclesiocentrism? Not the Catholic Church, which Dupuis himself admits does not hold such an ecclesiocentric perspective.²⁵ Puzzlingly, Dupuis bases much of the discussion in this section on the negative attitude towards humankind's religions articulated by some Protestant theologians like Karl Barth. Dupuis, however, seems to have seriously misread Barth's position, since Barth did not regard Church membership as necessary for salvation. In fact, in regard to God's salvific plan in Christ the Church's existence was not necessary at all.²⁶ Dupuis' supposed evidence is, then, ephemeral. He can offer no one who adheres to such an extreme version of Ecclesiocentrism. In my opinion, what we have here is the classic "Straw Man" argument which Dupuis utilizes in order to argue for the need to shift to another, less extreme paradigm.

Granted, I can see how one would want to eschew any view that tended to distort the Church's nature and role. I agree with Dupuis that the Church is not Lord Jesus Christ; nor, does she replace Him in any

²⁵ Cf. *TCTRP*, 183. Indeed, almost eight centuries earlier St. Thomas Aquinas (+1274) had given grounds for believing that someone who had expressed (at least, implicitly) a desire for Baptism and Church membership could be saved. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 68.

²⁶ As Nicholas M. Healy describes: Salvation [for Barth] has already occurred in Jesus Christ. . . . Nothing further needs to be done . . . except to acknowledge what has occurred. In fact, even the church's acknowledgement need not occur: Barth insists that the church is not finally necessary But if it should exist, the church's sole distinguishing characteristic is its knowledge. . . . [T]he church is that body of people that "knows what time it is" . . . they are those who are aware of what has happened and will happen in Jesus Christ Barth's is a very low ecclesiology after all. Barth relativizes the visible institution to the extent that it becomes in itself no more than one among a large number of other religious groups that compete for people's allegiance. . . . It is not a qualitatively distinct entity, for it has neither unique powers nor a distinctive ethos that would give its members the opportunity to engage in the most adequate way of life or response and witness to Jesus Christ (Nicholas M. Healy, "The Logic of Karl Barth's Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment, and Proposed Modifications," *Modern Theology* 10/3 [July 1994]: 265).

way. But where in the history of the Councils, in the ordinary teaching of the Popes and Bishops, in the wisdom of the Church Fathers has the Church been presented as such? I do not discount the existence of attitudes and statements either harboured or made by Church leaders throughout the centuries according to which the Church's role in God's plan of salvation was maximalized or overestimated. (In this regard, I would classify some statements made by the Popes - Boniface VIII's Bull, *Unam Sanctam*, from 1302 comes to mind - in which they tried to defend or assert the privileged status of the Bishopric of Rome against theological and political challenges.) Still, I cannot think of any *auctoritas approbata* for Catholic Theology in which it is proposed that: the Church substitutes for Jesus . . . or, that she is His equal . . . or, that she has effectually replaced Jesus in God's salvific plan. Perhaps, I am not as well or deeply read as Dupuis was. I have seen his class notes for courses he taught early on at St. Mary's College in India. Even then, his learning was immense. Still, he provides in *TCTRP* not one concrete example to illustrate this type of Ecclesiocentrism against which he is reacting.

Moreover, it disturbs me how Ecclesiocentrism is not just rejected by Dupuis as a paradigm, but also as a model. Whereas Dupuis attempts to fecundate his position by appropriating (what he considers to be) valid aspects from Theocentrism and the other models, no such procedure occurs with Ecclesiocentrism. On the contrary, once he has made up his mind to shift away from Ecclesiocentrism, any kind of Church-centred approach no longer exists.²⁷ Dupuis juxtaposes the Church with Christ as if the two realities could not possibly co-exist, apparently forgetting that his position conflicts appreciably with the New Testament's view of the Church as the Body of Christ (cf. e.g. Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:12-31;

²⁷ Dupuis' negativity towards the Church in his theology has been noticed by others: cf. e.g. Editorial Committee, "‘Tout récapituler dans le Christ’: À propos de l'ouvrage de Jacques Dupuis, *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*," *Revue thomiste* 98 (1998): 601-02, 606-18; Giuseppe de Rosa, "Una teologia problematica del pluralismo religioso," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 149/III (1998): 143; and, Gavin D'Costa, review of *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, by Jacques Dupuis, *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998): 911.

Eph 1:15–23; Col 1:15–20).²⁸ The Body of Christ—not in any objective-genitive sense as if Christ were possessed and controlled by the Church, rather in the subjective sense. In other words, the Church is *of* or *about* Jesus Christ: His mission; His ideals; His works and teachings; His Death and Resurrection; His Second Coming, and so forth.²⁹

Dupuis identifies three paradigms, namely: Ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism, and Theocentrism. He also classifies several models, namely: “Reality-centredness”, Regnocentrism, Logocentrism and Pneumatocentrism. According to Dupuis, the paradigms (in essence) are mutually restrictive and exclusive; and, the models are reciprocal and inclusive. Dupuis maintains that the Christocentric and Theocentric *paradigms* are not in fact incompatible with each other; rather, they include and call for each other. So, is he then arguing that they should be considered models - and, not paradigms at all? Perhaps. Responding to reviews of *TCTRP*, he writes:

I have indicated the need to go beyond the dilemma of choosing between Christocentrism and theocentrism . . . understood as paradigms mutually opposed and excluding each other. I have repeatedly affirmed that . . . far from excluding each other, theocentrism and Christocentrism mutually call for each other.³⁰

²⁸ The author of the Apocalypse of John even goes so far as to call the Church: “the Betrothed, the Wife of the Lamb” (Apo 21:9, Nova Vulgata). Cf. also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.), nos. 787–96.

²⁹ Cf. e.g. the following comment in the speech by the Servant of God, Pope Ven. Paul VI, at the opening of Vatican II’s Third Session: But in case anyone should think that . . . the church is closing in on itself in an attitude of complacency, forgetting on the one hand Christ, from whom it receives everything and to whom it owes everything, or on the other hand humanity, to whose service it is committed; it places itself between Him and the world, not satisfied with itself, nor as a forbidding barrier, not as an end in itself, but deeply concerned to be completely the Church of Christ, in Christ, for Christ, as well as completely the church of men, among men, for men; humble and yet glorious, the church of the Savior and yet reaching out to all men, preserving and yet diffusing the truth and the grace of the supernatural life (Paul VI, “The Ecumenical Council: The Prerogatives of the Episcopate,” *Vital Speeches of the Day* 30/24 [1 October 1964]: 740).

³⁰ Jacques Dupuis, “‘The Truth Will Make You Free’: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” *Louvain Studies* 24/3 (1999): 226.

He continues:

This is where the distinction [between “Paradigm” and “Model”] . . . needs to be kept in mind. I certainly take issue with the pluralist *paradigm*, but I believe that an inclusivist theology is compatible with a pluralistic *model*, insofar as there appears to be no contradiction in holding together the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as universal Saviour and a positive role in God’s plan of the other religious paths. [emphasis added].³¹

Still, it is in his own practical application of that distinction where I find that his thinking is surprisingly hazy. Concepts that he has plainly classified as *paradigms*—e.g., Christocentrism, Theocentrism—are later described by him as *models* (sometimes, on the same page) without any apparent differentiation in meaning. The same conceptual disorganization appears with the models (e.g., Regnocentrism, Soteriocentrism, etc.), which he sometimes calls paradigms!³² Dupuis’ own lack of clarity is not, however, limited to his book, *TCTRP*. Even in his later writings, he uses “paradigm” and “model” interchangeably, without distinction. For instance, in a later essay he declares:

It has become commonplace, while reviewing the main positions in today’s ongoing debate on the theology of religions, to distinguish three basic *paradigms*, namely, ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism, and Theocentrism. . . . Account must . . . be taken of the different *models* which these general - and partly deceptive - labels do cover [emphasis added].³³

Furthermore, in an article for a *Festschrift* dedicated to Gerald O’Collins, S.J., Dupuis refers more than once to Logocentrism as a “paradigm.”³⁴

³¹ Ibid., 228.

³² Cf. e.g. *TCTRP*, 191–95 passim, 197, 204–05, 385.

³³ Jacques Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology*, ed. Terrence Merrigan and Jacques Haers, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, no. 152 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), [83].

³⁴ Ibid., “Universality of the Word and Particularity of Jesus Christ,” in *The Convergence of Theology: A “Festschrift” Honoring Gerald O’Collins, S.J.*, ed. Daniel Kendall and Stephen T. Davis (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 321.

In *TCTRP*, Dupuis never identifies "Logocentrism" as a paradigm; rather, he maintains precisely that it is a model which merely re-iterates the Theocentric paradigm. The same terminological muddle is discernible elsewhere. In a response directed at scholarly critiques of *TCTRP*, he outlines:

I have proposed a Trinitarian Christology as a useful *model* for a theology of religions, one able to combine and hold together the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation and a true positive and salvific value of the other religious traditions for their followers. I have indicated the need to go beyond the dilemma of choosing between Christocentrism and theocentrism . . . understood as *paradigms* mutually opposed and excluding each other. . . . A distinction needs, however, to be made clearly between paradigm and model. . . . Paradigms exclude each other; models may be combined and may complete each other. Thus, I have spoken of a "theocentric Christocentrism" or of a "Trinitarian Christology," as a model. . . . The *model* proposed could well be called an inclusivist pluralism" (emphasis added).³⁵

Perhaps, then, we might be able to make some sense out of Dupuis' usage if we were to understand his use of the term, "Paradigm", as: "anything acting as a restrictive and closed system that tends to exclude all other views." But, there is still uncertainty. In one of his last articles before his death, Dupuis defended his idea of "Inclusive Pluralism" (as he had come to call his proposal), writing:

What then is meant by the *paradigm* of "inclusive pluralism?" [*sic*] It is intended, as I have explained repeatedly, to combine two fundamental affirmations which, though apparently contradictory must be seen as complementary . . . : "the universal constitutive character of the Christ event in the order of salvation and the saving significance of the religious traditions in a plurality of principle of the religious traditions within the one manifold plan of God for humankind." Reviewers of the book have sensed that

³⁵ Ibid., "Truth Will Make You Free," 226. Cf. also e.g. *TCTRP*, 205, 208, 212, 220.

this is essential to my thought on the theology of religions [emphasis added].³⁶

As a matter of fact, he has entitled this whole section of the article: "A New Paradigm: Inclusive Pluralism."³⁷ So, after all the talk about the need to transcend the use of opposing and mutually-exclusive paradigms in a Christian theology of religions, Dupuis ends up by proposing his own view as a paradigm—that is: as a conceptual system which excludes and, hence, is incompatible with all other systems. Dupuis, then, ends up in the theoretical *cul-de-sac* which he wanted to avoid. It makes me wonder just how useful his discussion of the "important" distinction between "Paradigm" and "Model" is after all.

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³⁶ Ibid., "Christianity and the Religions': Revisited," *Louvain Studies* 28/4 (2003): 369–70.

³⁷ Ibid., 369.

From the Holy Trinity to the Secular Trinity of all Reality

Panikkar's Vision of the Sacred in the Secular

Francis X. D'Sa

Francis X. D'Sa explores the ontic fabric of reality with the insights of Raimon Panikkar. If the Divine is Trinity, the cosmic reality has also a tri-une structure: with the centripetal, the centrifugal and the orbital dynamics the entire cosmos evolves as a dance, a *perichoresis*, in which everything is connected to everything else. On the religious landscape this would mean the compenetration of religions unto a universal harmony. In this process one realizes that faith in the Holy Trinity of the Divine leads to the perception of the Secular Trinity of all reality. Francis D'Sa SJ is the Founder-Director of the Centre for the Study of Religions, Pune.

1. The Holy Trinity

Raimon Panikkar's books are in a way like the novels of Charles Dickens. The worlds of Dickens' novels are such that one would not be very surprised if characters from one novel walked into the world of another. The worlds of his novels constitute one world depicting as they do deplorable social conditions but where goodness emerges in unexpected places. Though Panikkar's books are not novels they too share in a common world of shared insights. They depict novel aspects which when viewed with the third eye reveal sign-posts of a world 'hidden' within our world. Our worlds *symbolize*¹ (=make present, not

¹ See Panikkar's *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1979), 6-7: "Symbol here does not mean an epistemic

represent) the *tempiternal* world where time and eternity are not separated.² Alas, we are blind to the reality of real *symbols* and so we overlook the *symbolic difference*. The result is the objectification of symbols and with that the loss of the depth-dimension of reality. One more thing: Both Dickens and Panikkar rarely if ever speak of themselves or their families and friends. Their real person is revealed in their concerns, that is, in *what* and *how* they perceive and write about our world.

Raimon Panikkar's *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964) was his first major foray in interreligious-intercultural Christology.³ The title was the best advertisement for the book. For the traditional christologians Panikkar had gone too far. For Hindus he had taken a step backwards by attempting to see a colonial Christ in the heart of their traditions. There is, as usual, a pinch of truth even in a one-sided critique. Most of the complaints were, again as usual, from those who had not read the book or perhaps from some who had indeed read the book but not understood it. In course of time Panikkar took the blame on himself for not being explicit enough about the 'unknown Christ'. Unwittingly the book gave the impression that Christians believed that the Unknown Christ of the Hindus was known to the Christians but remained unknown to the Hindus. This is far, very far indeed from what Panikkar had intended. Whatever Panikkar published after that about Christ was as explicit as it was humanly possible. His last two masterpieces *Christophany. The Fullness of Man* (Orbis, 2004) and

sign, but an *ontomythical* reality that is precisely in the symbolizing. A symbol is not a symbol of another ('thing'), but of itself in the sense of a subjective genitive. A symbol is the symbol of that which is precisely (symbolized) in the symbol, and which, thus, does not exist without its symbol. A symbol is nothing but the symbol of that which appears in and as the symbol. Yet we must beware of identifying the symbol with the symbolized. To overlook the *symbolic difference*, i.e. to mistake the symbol for the symbolized, is precisely *avidyā*, ignorance, confusing the appearance with the reality. But reality is reality because it 'appears' real."

² *The Rhythm of Being. The Gifford Lectures* (New York: Orbis, 2010), 98: "Time seems to be intrinsic to Becoming and eternity to Being. If Being and Becoming belong together in an advaitic relationship, this entails that time and eternity are the two faces, as it were, of what I call *tempiternity*."

³ The revised edition with a new introduction was published in 1977.

The Rhythm of Being. The Gifford Lectures (Orbis, 2010) were elaborations on his understanding of the Christ from two different perspectives.⁴ Christophany, in contradistinction to Christology, focuses on *experiencing* the Christ everywhere and in all beings.⁵ *The Rhythm of Being* peripherally discusses the Christ but his reflections treat at length of the diverse traditions with their different approaches to their respective faith-centres. All of Panikkar's writings are based on his personal experiences but not all address faith-questions as thematically, as for instance his *Christophany* does. On the other hand very few of his writings are as profoundly intellectual as *The Rhythm of Being*.

After the *Unknown Christ of Hinduism* Panikkar brought out a booklet *The Trinity and World Religions. Icon, Person, Mystery* (1970).⁶ If the former brought him the attention of the world of religious

⁴ When Panikkar delivered the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh they carried the title "Trinity and Atheism: The Housing of the Divine in the Contemporary World". Panikkar saw this book as "an attempt 'to liberate the Divine from the burden of being God.'" (S.Eastham [Ed.], *The Cosmotheandric Experience. Emerging Religious Experience* [Orbis, 1993; Motilal Banarsidass, 1998], xi), Lectures 3. (Theism/Monotheism) and 4. (Atheism/Deism/Polytheism/Pantheism) were listed under the subtitle a) The Unsatisfactory Answers of Theisms; Lecture 5. (Theogenesis and Theology) came under the subtitle b) The Divine Mystery. And Lectures 6. (The Radical Trinity), 7. (The Cosmotheandric Invariant), 8. (The Divine Dimension), 9. (The Emerging Myth) and 10. (Trinity and the Survival of Being) are printed under the subtitle c) The Triadic Myth. The published lectures (about twenty years after they were delivered) consist of eight chapters, with an Introduction and an Epilogue with mostly different chapter-headings. The present form of the epilogue which seems to be an after-thought gave Panikkar enough headache. He was dissatisfied with what he had delivered. "I must admit that all ultimate questions cannot have final answers, but that we can at least be aware of the problem we have presented. I have touched the limits of my understanding and must stop here. The Tree of Knowledge again and again tempts one at the cost of neglecting the more important tree, the Tree of Life...It has taken me twenty years to admit this, and I apologize."

⁵ See the first three chapters of his *Christophany*: 1. A Challenge to Christology, 2. The Task of Christophany and 3. The Christophanic Experience.

⁶ Bangalore: CISRS, 1970 and Madras: CLS, 1970. A revised version with a revised title appeared in London, DLT, 1973: *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man. Icon, Person, Mystery*. And later in London: DTL and New York: Orbis ²1975. Joseph Prabhu, the editor of *The Rhythm of Being*, speaks in his Foreword (p.xvii) of *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), which has not been available to me.

scholars the latter was the beginning of his rich legacy regarding the interconnectedness of all religions and cultures and ultimately of all reality. Unexpectedly *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* turned out to be controversial but fortunately not the revolutionary *The Trinity and World Religions*. Very skillfully Panikkar had introduced seminal reflections when commenting on original creedal formulations. These in course of time were to transport his thinking not just to 'the ends of the earth' but extend it to the whole of reality.

Already then Panikkar wrote in the revised version (1973): "One insight may be considered central in the pages that follow: a cosmotheandric and thus non-dualistic vision of reality. He makes three remarks about it:

a) the universality of the experience and the reality of the so-called three persons (in the singular and in the plural) as represented by the three personal pronouns...No known language lacks the 'I, Thou, He/She/It' with the respective plural forms. It is in this ultimate and universal structure that the Trinity is reflected, or to speak theologically, because the Trinity is 'I, Thou, He/She/It, We, You, They' human experience presents this character. The Trinity appears then as the ultimate paradigm of personal relationships (and neither substantial nor verbal).⁷

b) the radical inter-relationship of everything...These relationships encompass and constitute the entire web of reality. The Trinity as pure relation epitomizes the radical relativity of all that there is.⁸

c) the fundamental unity of reality, which should not be overshadowed by the diversity of the whole universe.⁹

Before commenting on the Trinity Panikkar discusses somewhat at length three forms of spirituality. Due to space considerations I am leaving out the discussion.¹⁰ All the same I need to point out here that Karma-mārga, the path of cultic action, will later on lead to the discovery

⁷ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, xiv-xv.

⁸ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, xv.

⁹ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, xv.

¹⁰ Before commenting on the Trinity Panikkar discusses three types of spirituality which due to space considerations I am leaving out: Iconolatry: Karma-mārga,

of the cosmic dimension of reality; that Bhakti-mārga, the path of personalism, will lead to the discovery of the human dimension of reality and Jñāna-mārga, the path of awareness and meditation, will lead to the discovery of the divine or depth-dimension of reality. Here we preview them as dimensions of his cosmotheandric intuition.

2. Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man

We shall now present some of Panikkar's comments in his *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* on the three persons of the Holy Trinity as precursors of the future developments in his trinitarian/advaitic/cosmotheandric thinking.

The Trinity

The Trinity, then, may be considered as a junction where the authentic spiritual dimensions of all religions meet. The Trinity is God's self-revelation in the fullness of time, the consummation both of all that God has already 'said' of himself to man and of all that man has been able to attain and know of God in his thought and mystical experience. In the Trinity a true encounter of religions takes place, which results, not in a vague fusion or mutual dilution, but in an authentic enhancement of all the religious and even cultural elements that are contained in each.¹¹

It is in fact in the Trinity that a true place is found for whatever in religion is not simply the particular deposit of a given age or culture.¹² Only by a deepening of trinitarian understanding will

Personalism: Bhakti-mārga and Advaita: Jñāna-mārga. In Karma-mārga Panikkar stresses the cultic act of adoration. Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 18. In personalism "Union with God does in fact find its most perfect expression in the community of love and even more so in personal communion. God is an 'I' who calls me and names me 'thou', and in calling me gives me my being and my love i.e. my very capacity to respond to him." Ibid., 24. Finally "In *advaita*...contemplation is simply the vision of total Reality where the 'ego' as such has no longer any place; it is the experience of the Absolute in its simplicity and its complexity, perfect joy attained in the *in-stasy of union*". Ibid., 38. Furthermore "*Jñāna-mārga*, the way of knowledge, of pure contemplation, of ontological *theoria*, is the way *par excellence* of *advaita*. For the *advaitin* it is not a matter of transforming the world or even himself, as it is with the *karma-yogin*. Not for him is it a matter of worshipping God by loving him to the utmost, after the manner of the *bhakta*." Ibid. 39.

¹¹ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 42.

such an encounter in depth come to pass, the synthesis and mutual fecundation of the different spiritual attitudes which comprise religions, without forcing or doing violence to the fundamental intuitions of the different spiritual paths.¹³

Perhaps the deep intuitions of hinduism and buddhism, which come from a different universe of discourse than the greek, may help us to penetrate further the trinitarian mystery.¹⁴

God, the Father

The Father is the Absolute, the only God, *theós*. The Trinity is not a tri-theism. It is very significant that the first trinitarian formulae do not speak of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, but of the God, the Christ and the Spirit. Neither the Son nor the Spirit is God, but, precisely, the Son of God, and the Spirit of God, 'equal' to the One God (*o theós*) as God (*theós*).¹⁵

Everything that the Father *is* he transmits to the Son. Everything that the Son *receives* he *gives* to the Father in return. This gift (of the Father, in the final analysis) is the Spirit.

If the Father begets the Son (and this is a total generation since the Father gives himself fully to the Son) that means that what the Son is, is the Father, i.e. the Son is the *is* of the Father...To know the Son *qua* Son is to realise the Father also...in the generation of the Son he has, so to speak, given everything...Is it not here, truly speaking, in this essential apophatism of the 'person' of the Father, is this *kenosis* of Being at its very source, that the buddhist experience of *nirvāna* and *śūnyatā* (emptiness) should be situated. 'God created out of nothing' (*ex nihilo*), certainly, i.e. out of himself (*a Deo*) - a buddhist will say.¹⁶

¹² Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 46: See also *Christophany*, 13: "...the christophany that we propose considers the other religions of the world not as Christians have often interpreted them but as they understand themselves - as, to use scholastic language, *loci theologici*, proper and legitimate places for theological activity".

¹³ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 43.

¹⁴ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 46.

¹⁵ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 45.

God is Silence total and absolute, the silence of Being - and not only the being of silence. His word who completely expresses and consumes him, is the Son. The Father *has* no being the Son is *his* being. The source of being is not being.¹⁷ And: The Son is the visibility of the invisible, St Irenaeus repeats.¹⁸

The Son: God-from God, Light-from Light

It is the Son who is, and so *is* God. He is certainly *God-from* God and *Light-from* Light...This of-God is precisely the Son. It is the Son who acts, who creates. Through him everything was made. In him everything exists. He is the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega.¹⁹

Now this God, the Son, is in trinitarian terminology the Mystery hidden since the world began, the Mystery of which the Scriptures speak, and which, according to christians, was manifested in Christ.²⁰

Even by definition the unique link between the created and the uncreated, the relative and the absolute, the temporal and the eternal, earth and heaven, is Christ, the only mediator. Between these two poles everything that functions as mediator, link, 'conveyor', is Christ, the sole priest of the cosmic priesthood, the Lord *par excellence*...The reason I persist in calling it Christ is that it seems to me that phenomenologically Christ presents the fundamental characteristics of the mediator between the divine and cosmic, eternal and temporal, etc., which other religions call *lævara*, *Tāthagata* or even Jahweh, Allah and so on... Beings *are* in so far as they participate in the Son, *are from, with and through* him. Every being is a *christophany* a showing forth of Christ.²¹

¹⁶ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 46-47.

¹⁷ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 48.

¹⁸ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 49.

¹⁹ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 51.

²⁰ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 52.

²¹ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 53-54.

The Spirit of God

The *Self* of the Father is the Son, his *in-himself* is the Spirit. But the Son has no *Self*; he is Thou of the Father; his *Self* in relation to his Father is a Thou. Similarly with the Spirit; The Spirit 'in himself' is a contradiction. There is only the Spirit of God, of the Father and Son. He is the One sent. He is neither an I who speaks to another, nor a Thou to whom someone else speaks, but rather the we between the Father and the Son - that we which encompasses also the whole universe in a peculiar way...The Son is assuredly the Thou of the Father. Furthermore, the Son is the Word. The speaker is known only in the Word. He is nothing outside this speaking which is his Son.²²

The *advaita* which helps us express suitably the 'relation' God-World is again a precious aid in elucidating the intra-trinitarian problem. If the Father and the Son are not *two*, they are not one either: the Spirit both unites and distinguishes them. He is the bond of unity; the *we* in between, or rather within.

The Father has no name because he is beyond every name, even the name of Being. The Spirit has and can have no name either because he is a certain way on this side of every name, even that of Being. Being and beings - and hence all existence - belong to the kingdom and sphere of the Son.²³

One can only pray in the Spirit, by addressing the Father through the Son. It is rather the Spirit, who prays in us...It is to this Spirit that most of the upanishadic assertions about the Absolute point, when seen in their own deepest light...Indeed what is the Spirit but the *ātman* of the Upanishads, which is said to be identical with *brahman*, although this identity can only be existentially recognised and affirmed once 'realisation' has been attained?²⁴

The Spirit leads man to realise that he is not an I (*ego*) but a thou (*te*); that he is only in so far as one I (*ego*, *aham*) says to him *thou*...²⁵

²² Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 61.

²³ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 62.

²⁴ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 63-64.

²⁵ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 66.

Readers might wonder why I have quoted Panikkar at length. The aim of this paper is to sketch his pilgrimage from the Holy Trinity to the Secular Trinity of all Reality. And the subtitle speaks of Panikkar's vision of the sacred in the secular.

Panikkar's pilgrimage begins with the Christian Trinity and arrives at what he calls the Radical Trinity, the secular Trinity at the root of all reality, namely, the Divine, the Cosmic and the Human [dimensions]. Far from giving up the trinitarian tradition of the christians he witnesses to the fact that it is the christian tradition that has led him to the root (=radical) of the matter. There Panikkar discovers the *cosmotheandric* constitution of all reality. In this revised secular formulation of the perichoretic process the voice of this Christ is hardly audible. The revised understanding also refers to the positive reception of the contributions of other cultures and religions.

a) The point of departure of Panikkar's comments is the age-old formulation of the Church's trinitarian doctrine. Panikkar's reflections take off from tradition. He is thinking with the Church.²⁶

b) In his sophisticated hermeneutics text and tradition are anything but static. His basic thesis is that "*the interpretation of a Text is inseparable from the Text of the Interpretation*. Text and Interpretation belong together".²⁷ The other way round: "*Without interpretation, there is no text*, so that the interpretation of a text belongs to the complete text."²⁸

²⁶ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 45: Panikkar says, "there is a very real continuity between the theory of the Trinity that I out line below and christian doctrine".

²⁷ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 51.

²⁸ Panikkar, "The Texture of a Text: In Response to Paul Ricoeur" in: *Point of Contact*, II 1 (New York, 1978), 51-64. To give an idea of the level of Panikkar's sophistication I shall quote his "Five Threads of Text (pancasūtra): 1. A text is word, crystallized in matter, space, time and Man. This first sūtra (thread) links text with Man. 2. A text says: This second sūtra links text with word. 3. A text says what it means. This third sūtra links text with meaning. 4. A text means whatever meaning can be extracted from it. This fourth sūtra links text with present human life. 5. The meaning of a text emerges from an ever elusive horizon. This fifth sūtra links text with mythos." Among Panikkar's other important hermeneutical contributions there is one which is exceptional but alas, not well known. "Words and Terms", in M.M. Olivetti (Ed.)

c) Panikkar attempts to understand religious texts also from within other cultures such as buddhism and hinduism. This has also been a legitimate concern in the history of the church to inculturate the Gospel from within other cultures.²⁹

d) In this venture Panikkar assumes that religious experiences taking place in different cultures, though very different, are interconnected not so much through their respective cultures but because of the One Mystery (the trinitarian Christophany) from whom and through whom all revelation derives.³⁰

e) In general Panikkar's main concern throughout has been to retrieve the interconnectedness of all reality. Distinctions, not separations, pave the path that leads to the harmony of all beings.

f) Panikkar's search for the "*nexus mysteriorum*, the internal consistency and inter-relatedness of the ultimate mysteries of the world (Denz. 3016)" has brought forth neologisms that are all of a piece. They are not just expressions of this overriding concern. They constitute the basic suprastructure and infrastructure of his holistic world.³¹

Esistenza, Mito, Ermeneutica (Scritti per Enrico Castelli, Archivio di Filosofia, Padova [CEDAM]), II, 117-133.

²⁹ See Paul IV's Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* (1975), 20: "All this could be expressed in the following words: what matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et spes*, [50] always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God. The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them. "The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed."

³⁰ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 42-43.

³¹ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, viii.

In the above quotations a number of points are worth noting:

The interrelatedness of all reality is already thematic here (1973). This interrelatedness refers also to religions and cultures. Their meeting point (at this stage) is the Christ, the cosmic mediator. Evidently this Christ is more than the Christ of popular Christianity. Though the expression is not employed here the Christ *functions* now as the *cosmotheandric* Christ presenting as he does the fundamental characteristics of the mediator between the divine and cosmic, eternal and temporal, etc., which other religions call *Īśvara*, *Tathāgata* or even Jahweh, Allah and so on...

Implicitly the other religions (like buddhism and hinduism) function as *loci theologici*. But in the later publication *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* they are treated explicitly as *loci theologici* in that they are thematically part of an interreligious and intercultural Christophany. In *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* Panikkar persists in speaking of *Christophany* because one must remain true to one's tradition. This by no means implies that buddhists, hindus, muslims, etc. have to accept the christian name. They too have to remain faithful to their traditions.³² Dialogue cannot afford to ignore or give up historical realities. But dialogue also means that the diverse traditions need to find meeting points, more concretely they need to find 'homeomorphic' (or functional) equivalents between, for example, the *advaita* (of the vedantins), *trinity* (of the christians) and *pratyāsamutpāda* (of the buddhists). Such functional equivalents show the way to meeting-points. At meeting-points we do not give up our beliefs but find out with the help of *diatopical hermeneutics* where we can meet in order to build bridges of mutual understanding.³³ This is necessary because beliefs are credible

³² See *Redemptoris missio* §56: "Those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretense or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side. There must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings"

³³ Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York, N.Y./Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, rev.ed. 1999), 27: "It [diatopical hermeneutics] is a hermeneutic dealing with understanding the contents of diverse cultures that do not have cultural or direct historical links

only within their own belief-world. Extrapolating beliefs shows lack of seriousness with regard to the beliefs of others. In such a case they are viewed not from within their own belief-world but from outside their belief-world. This is what diatopical hermeneutics attempts to point out and overcome.³⁴

Every being and every religious tradition is seen as a *christophany*, a showing forth of Christ. Every tradition has its own name for that Mystery which christians call Christ. It might be relevant to mention here that this does not lead to relativism but *relativity*.³⁵ Beliefs are valid within their belief-world because they have their origin and significance there, not outside their belief-world. Beliefs make sense there because they are *related* to their belief-world, hence relativity.³⁶

In this context it will be appropriate to say a word about Panikkar's use of the principle of Advaita. It is for him a third possibility of intelligibility. He makes such copious use of it that one can safely assert that it has now become an integral element of Panikkar's theology of religion. But the Advaita referred to here is not Shankaracharya's Advaita.³⁷ Panikkar employs it mostly in the context of homeomorphic equivalents. Thus he considers Advaita as a homeomorphic equivalent of the christian Trinity and the buddhist *pratītyasamutpāda*.

with one another. They belong to different loci, *topoi*, so that before anything else we have to forge the tools of understanding in the encounter itself, for we cannot - should not - assume a priori a common language. The privileged place of this hermeneutic is obviously the encounter of religious traditions. A christian cannot assume at the outset that he knows what a buddhist means when he speaks of *nirvāna* and *anātman*, just as a buddhist cannot immediately be expected to understand what a christian means by God and Christ before they have encountered not just the concepts but their living contexts, which include different ways at looking at reality."

³⁴ Panikkar, "The Texture of a Text: In Response to Paul Ricoeur" in: *Point of Contact*, II 1 (New York, 1978), 51-64.

³⁵ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 75: "Relativity is not the same as relativism, we have been proposing all the time."

³⁶ Panikkar, "Faith and Belief: A Multicultural Experience", in: *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 41-59.

³⁷ See my, *The Advaita Principle of Raimon Panikkar and Trinity*, in: Patrick Gnanapragasam / Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Eds.), *Negotiating Borders. Theological Explorations in the Global Era. Essays in Honour of Prof. Felix Wilfred* (Delhi: ISPCK 2008), 158-166.

Regarding the universality of the experience and the reality of the so-called three persons (I, Thou, etc.) the background for it is the I, You and We of the Holy Trinity. "No known language lacks the 'I, Thou, He/She, It' with the respective plural forms. It is in this ultimate and universal structure that the Trinity is reflected or, to speak theologically, because the Trinity is 'I, Thou, He/She/It, We, You, They', human experience presents this character. The Trinity appears then as the ultimate paradigm of personal relationships (and neither substantial nor verbal)." ³⁸

All this however will become more meaningful if we first familiarize ourselves with Panikkar's universe of meaning.

3. Panikkar's Holistic World

Space does not permit us to go into details. I shall briefly introduce the more important aspects of Panikkar's world.

Karma and *rta* are two sides of the same coin. Karma is the interconnected whole of the past, the present and the future. *Rta* is the principle that sees to the harmonious working of the whole. Says Panikkar, "*rta* is the ultimate foundation of everything; it is the 'supreme', although this is not to be understood in a static sense... *rta* is rather the 'law' or universal order embodied in sacrifice."³⁹ Sacrifice or *Yajña*, the total whole, is both the path and the goal of our life. *Yajña*, the interconnectedness of all beings, embodies both Karma and *rta*. It is in such a context that Panikkar speaks of *ontonomy*. Each being is unique and so is uniquely (ontonomically) related to the interconnected whole. An important implication is Panikkar's distinction between individual and person.⁴⁰ An individual is an island⁴¹ but: "Each person is a knot in the

³⁸ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, xiv-xv.

³⁹ Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience. Mantramāñjari* (Berkeley: University of California & London DLT, 1977), 350.

⁴⁰ Panikkar, *Christophany*, 65: "A person is neither an individual nor an undifferentiated existence. Precisely insofar as it is something ultimate, the person escapes every definition. Person is relation because Being is relation...A person is a knot that is conscious - that possesses a human consciousness - of being a knot, a consciousness that could be called self-consciousness or a knowing oneself to be an I."

⁴¹ *Christophany*, 77: "An isolated individual (if such existed) would not be a person.

universal net".⁴² This is from the perspective of our cosmic connections.

However if you take the perspective of consciousness we have the *logos*-dimension, the *mythos*-dimension and the *pneuma*-dimension. The *logos* has to do with intelligibility and its expressions. The *mythos* acts as the background of our knowing and understanding because it is the store room of all knowing and understanding. The *mythos*, as background, enables the process of knowing and understanding. And what is understood enters the magma of the *mythos*; this brings about a change in the background itself. But it is the Spirit (= *pneuma*) that is responsible for the direction of change. The Spirit determines which way the 'wind' blows. Listening to the Spirit is an important component of becoming a person. "Receiving the *pneuma* is a permanent passage, a *pascha*, a pilgrimage; the procession from *mythos* through *logos* to *pneuma* is endless. This pneumatic dimension guarantees the constant openness into which we may take a step forward."⁴³

Helpfully Panikkar adds: "*logos*, *mythos* and *pneuma* correspond to the thought, the unthought and the unthinkable. These three interpenetrate, there is a *perichoresis*, they dwell within one another."⁴⁴ Panikkar is not deducing but following a sort of phenomenological observation of the types of human consciousness. If it is the *mythos* that creates a community it is the *logos* that expresses it. We cannot objectify the *mythos* of our community, much less can we manipulate our *mythos* consciously. As stated earlier, the movement of the *mythos* is dependent on the Spirit. Here too we have a trinitarian perichoretic structure: *logos*, *mythos* and *pneuma*.

4. The Cosmotheandric Experience

The development of Panikkar's thought shows a leit motif that is unmistakably trinitarian, focusing on the three centres of reality, as he

The person is our innermost, most mysterious reality, incommunicable because she is already communion."

⁴² Panikkar, "Śūnyatā and Plêrôma", *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, rev.ed. 1999), 131.

⁴³ Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1979), 347.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

calls them: God, World and Man. In 1977 he published a seminal work "Colligite Fragmenta: For an Integration of Reality"⁴⁵ wherein he argues that reality (=all that is) is three-dimensional and can be differently named as God, World and Man or the Divine, the Cosmic and the Human, etc. The cosmic dimension refers to the *objectifiable* dimension of all reality. The human dimension refers to the *objectifying* dimension and the divine dimension to the *limitlessness* of the cosmic and human dimensions. "There is a kind of *perichoresis* 'dwelling within one another', of these three dimensions of Reality: the Divine, the Human, and the Cosmic."⁴⁶

This is his *cosmotheandric* (cosmos+theos+aner) intuition.⁴⁷ For one thing, till now we had to speak separately of the Cosmic, the Divine and the Human, potentially misleading us sometimes into separating one from the other two. Now with one expression we can speak of the three together. And for another, we can understand now the assertion that "God, Man, and World are three artificially substantivized forms of the three primordial adjectives which describe Reality."⁴⁸ Panikkar's contention is that this threefold structure is to be found in all cultures but in diverse ways and in different formulations.⁴⁹

With that he uncovered a path towards the wholeness of the Real, something that has preoccupied him throughout his life. In this venture Panikkar's great advantage has been his awareness, almost from the start, of the fragmentation in and around us.⁵⁰ We have hints of this from

⁴⁵ "Colligite Fragmenta: For an Integration of Reality", in: F. A. Eigo and S. E. Fittipaldi (Ed.): *From Alienation to At-one-ness*, Villanova, Pa. (The Villanova University Press, 1977), 19-132.

⁴⁶ Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel - A Meditation on Non-Violence", *Cross- Currents* 29, no.2 (1979), 214-216.

⁴⁷ In his *The Rhythm of Being* (p.269) Panikkar states: "Man as Man is aware of the three realms. This is the *theanthropocosmic invariant*. This study presents the *cosmotheandric intuition* as an adequate *cross-cultural invariant* for the majority of cultures of our time. It is a cross-cultural interpretation of the invariant."

⁴⁸ Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-Style", in *Philosophers on Their Own Work*, (Berne: Peter Lang, 1978), 206.

⁴⁹ Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience. Emerging Religious Consciousness*. S. Eastham (Ed) (New York: Orbis, 1993), 54-56

⁵⁰ Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", in Joseph Prabhu (Ed.), *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Orbis 1996), 287. Panikkar's early studies of the

his earliest writings. They contain the seeds of his later developments. The quotations, for example, in the first part of this contribution are a good example of this thesis. His insightful analysis of the three forms of spirituality Panikkar refers to the three Persons of the Trinity.⁵¹

Lastly, pluralistic is how Panikkar would describe the religious state of our world. In this age of pluralism he speaks of homeomorphic equivalents (*perichôrêsis*, *pratītyasamutpāda*, *advaita*).⁵² These can be of great help in the task of bridge-building between cultures.⁵³ His personal response to pluralism is best expressed in the following statement: "I 'left' as a christian, I 'found' myself a hindu, and I 'return' a buddhist, without having ceased to be a christian."⁵⁴ Later on he added "secular" to the list of traditions where he felt at-home.

5. From the Holy Trinity to the Secular Trinity

It is time to speak of Panikkar's Sacred Secularity⁵⁵. With that he means a tradition that takes the *saeculum* (time-and-space) seriously. Sacred secularity is also a tradition that communicates meaning, meaning in life. It rightly affirms "that being and time are coextensive, so that there is nothing not touched by time. But the temporal aspect of the

sciences, their assumptions and presuppositions led him to the conclusion that "*Modern science is perverse*. It has perverted the meaning of words by converting them into terms. For modern sciences time is no longer the life-span of things but the derivate of space and velocity. Space is no longer the habitat and larger body of things, but just a measure; matter is just another parameter related to force and acceleration; and similar reductionisms with fire, light, energy and the like." Panikkar further complains (*ibid.*) that modern technoscience operates with abstractions. Due to its spectacular success people take scientific abstractions for the reality from which they have been abstracted. Moreover science cannot deal with the *uniqueness* of things. Science then is not part of the solution but part of the problem.

⁵¹ Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 9-40. of reality is essential to the cosmotheandric experience."

⁵² Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, 276.

⁵³ Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, 277.

⁵⁴ Panikkar, "Faith and Belief", *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 42.

⁵⁵ Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man* (New York: Orbis; London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1973), 9-13 and the chapter on secularization 28-55.

entire reality is only one aspect of the tempiternal nature of everything".⁵⁶ Such secularity is for Panikkar *sacred secularity*.

What I have called Secular Trinity Panikkar calls Radical Trinity.⁵⁷ "The radical Trinity I am advocating...would extend this privilege of the divine Trinity to the whole of reality. Reality is not only 'trinitarian', it is the true and ultimate Trinity. The Trinity is not the privilege of the Godhead but the character of reality as a whole."⁵⁸

What could be the factors that motivated Panikkar to shift gears from the Holy Trinity to the Secular Trinity of which he asserts that it is "the true and ultimate Trinity"? Panikkar's Christian trinitarian focus and hindu concern for wholeness-and- interconnectedness, complementing each other, gave him a head start as it were what concerns his life-long trinitarian preoccupation. On the one hand traditional christian understanding of the Trinity was a central feature of the Godhead. On the other, hindu stress on interconnectedness was the door to an holistic approach to reality. Probably the two approaches in synch gave birth to the cosmotheandric insight, a kind of reading glasses for reading reality. The *perichoresis* of the Christian tradition vis à vis the interconnection of all reality (*yajña*) brought forth the much needed cosmotheandric bridge between the two. His insightful neologisms - some of which we referred to in the section on Panikkar's holistic world - are all of a piece with the cosmotheandric intuition. That is the reason why they are all without exception part of the indispensable kit of intercultural dialogue.

In the cosmotheandric perspective where the Cosmic, the Divine and the Human are perichoretically connected it was not difficult for Panikkar to

⁵⁶ Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-Style", *Philosophers on Their Own Work*, André Mercier & Maja Svilar (Eds.) (Frankfurt, etc: Peter Lang 1978), 205.

⁵⁷ The following confession (in *The Rhythm of Being*, 256) is as interesting as it is illuminating: "I am ready to concede that were it not for the Christian doctrine I might not have the experience of the Divine in the form that I have come to. I may also confess that without the vedantic *sat-cit-ānanda* I might not have deepened the same experience in the way that I have. Nevertheless, whatever the intellectual preparation might have been, I have to add that I 'received' the intellectual awareness of the truth of the Trinity in and through the experiential knowledge of Christ."

⁵⁸ Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, 260.

connect the 'Father' with the Divine (=the depth-dimension), the 'Son' with the Human and the 'Spirit' (who renews the face of the earth!) with the Cosmos.

But what is so great about relating the Holy Trinity of the Christians with the Secular Trinity of reality? The sublime Trinity, in which the Christians believe they participate, is now shown to be in effect the world in which they live, move and have their being. Reality is Trinity and Trinity is Reality. Our universe then is shot through with trinitarian *perichoresis*.⁵⁹ The threefold dance consists of, to keep to the metaphor, threefold dynamics: The centripetal dynamics of the "Father", the centrifugal dynamics of the "Son" and the dynamics of the orbital movement of the "Spirit". Each is totally different (but not separated) from and also completely dependent on the other two. There is unity in diversity and diversity in unity. This is only one of the manifold ways of looking at the cosmotheandric mystery.

The ultimate aim of life is to participate in the harmony of the Cosmic, the Human and the Divine, neither overstressing the Divine nor neglecting the Cosmic but in the process becoming increasingly aware of one's cosmotheandric response-ability.

⁵⁹ Remembering St Augustine's warning "qui incipit numerare, incipit errare", one must not overstress the three of the Trinity. See my "How Trinitarian is Panikkar's Trinity?", in: *Rhythm and Vision Conference in Memory of Raimon Panikkar*. Proceedings, George Mason University, Fairfax, U.S.A. 2011, CIRPIT REVIEW n.3, 2012 Supplement, 1-16.

The Anthropo-centric Theology of Sebastian Kappen

Jacob Parappally

Jacob Parappally clarifies the anthropocentric perspectives of S. Kappen. With a perceptive analysis of the basic types of religiosity in India Kappen upholds the value of the ethical concerns over the cosmic and the Gnostic. With a fresh look on the message of Jesus he shows how Jesus' central concern was the human person. He draws the theological consequence that all *God-talk* must be centred on the integral liberation of the human person. Jacob Parappally MSFS is the Director of Tejas Vidya Peetha, The Francalain Regional Theologate, Bangalore.

Sebastian Kappen, S.J (1924 -1993) has made significant contribution to Indian Christian theology with his contextually sensitive and systematically articulated theological reflections and passionate plea for integral human liberation in the Indian context. In 1962 he took his doctorate in theology from the Gregorian University, Rome, on the theme *Religious Alienation and Praxis according to the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 by Karl Marx*. He was asked to do research on Marxism by his superiors to fight against the anti-Christian propaganda of the Marxist Party of Kerala which came to power through democratic election in 1957. Kappen claimed that his study of Marxism to fight against Marxism had helped him to understand the person and mission of the historical Jesus.

Kappen's interactions with many groups of young men and women and the action groups committed to transform the Indian society with its dehumanizing structures and oppressive socio-economic, religio-cultural

and political systems challenged his own Christian faith and theological vision. Kappen believes that only from a critical analysis of the Indian context with all its positive and negative aspects that shape the human life and destiny can give direction to the possible transformation of the Indian society. Committed to the Person and the mission of Jesus Kappen is convinced that authentic Jesus' tradition must enter into dialogue with the genuinely original forces of self-transcendence within the religious and cultural traditions of India for an integral liberation of everyone and the Indian society itself.

Kappen's project is to unleash the liberative potential of Jesus' tradition for the transformation of the Indian society in dialogue with the liberative potential of the Indian religio-cultural traditions. In the process he has given some directions and orientations to liberate theology itself from its traditional mould of theo-centrism to anthropocentrism without reducing theology to anthropology. If theologizing is not a mere 'God-talk' alienated from the reality of life where humans struggle to live a dignified human life and unfold themselves as humans in right relationship with God, other humans and nature, it has to transcend the God-centred theology. When theology becomes like any other ideology that alienates humans from their vocation to be humans it becomes an end itself and can be manipulated by some to oppress and exploit many. Therefore, Kappen attempts at an anthropocentric theology that re-captures the biblical revelation of God who is deeply involved in the lives of the oppressed and the marginalized and has humans as the centre of God's concern. Using the method of Marxian social analysis Kappen critiques the Indian context of religiosity and spirituality, culture and philosophy, socio-economic structures from the perspective of his Christian faith. All the dimensions that shape life in the Indian society alienate humans from their authentic destiny as humans revealed in Jesus Christ. According to Kappen even Jesus' tradition could not fulfil the mission of liberation because that too was made to lose its prophetic thrust and transformative power.

1. A Critique of Theo-centric Theologies in the Indian Context

Kappen identifies three types of religiosity in India. They are the cosmic, the Gnostic, and ethical. Both cosmic and Gnostic types of religiosity with their spiritualities and theologies expressed in rituals, myths

and ascetical practices alienated human beings from themselves and their life situations. The spiritualization and mystification of the historical situation of dehumanization by these religiosities created or justified the systems and structures of inequality and injustice. The ethical religiosity that courageously challenged the systems of oppression was eventually co-opted and integrated into cosmic and Gnostic religiosities that it lost its prophetic challenge and potentiality for societal transformation with its anthropocentric vision.

In its very content and orientation the theology of cosmic religiosity alienates humans from their historical contexts and locates them in the cosmic order. Human life is seen as a part of the cosmic life and at the mercy of the forces of the universe beyond the control of humans. There is no freedom to shape one's destiny. One is condemned to play one's role assigned by cosmic powers that assume various names and forms. Thus the cosmic religiosity identifies the microcosm with the macrocosm. It is characterized by magical praxis and the cyclic view of time. Cosmic religiosity reduces humans to an object of magico-mythical forces; it gives importance to the unconsciousness in humans and expresses itself in myths. According to Kappen, this religiosity is individualistic and is founded on determinism. In India this cosmic religiosity expresses itself in Vaishnavism and Saivism. Vishnu resides in heaven and is the solar god. He must incarnate again and again to save the world. He is the god of sacrifice, the god of priests and the establishment. He is the preserver of the status quo of the caste system. He is patriarchal. On the other hand, Shiva can never become incarnate, because he is of the earth. Shiva is unorthodox and rejects the accepted norms of behaviour. He is the destroyer of sacrifice. He is of the matriarchal type, accepting his consort as his equal. Both of these gods of fertility have much influence in the life of the people. Those who follow this religiosity interpret their misery and misfortune in terms of these cosmic forces and let themselves be enslaved by this belief system. They adjust themselves to the shackles of unfreedom and become incapable of unfolding themselves as humans.

Gnostic religiosity which relativises and even negates the reality of historical existence in comparison with the Absolute reality is based on the identity of Atman with Brahman or the individual with the Absolute. It is the spiritualization or the theoretical vision of cosmic religiosity.

More than a religiosity it is a philosophical attitude. It seeks to escape from the cyclic time to timelessness and considers human as the appearance of the Absolute. In it the dominant stress is infra-consciousness in human beings.. Gnostic religiosity is also individualistic and expresses itself in mytho-logos. According to Kappen for the Gnostic Hinduism the prevailing situation of injustice and exploitation in concrete existence is a play of Brahman. The Gnostic religiosity thus legitimizes the situation of evil, both physical and moral. It can only inspire humans to withdraw from the sphere of historical action, multiplicity, freedom and passion. If the Christian doctrine and praxis would integrate Jesus into Gnostic religiosity, that would further alienate the prophetic function of Jesus in Indian context which needs to be liberated from its enslaving world-view.

The third type of religiosity that emerged in the Indian religious tradition is ethical religiosity. In its anthropology, the human being emerges as a subject seeking its own identity in the world. This religiosity insisted on the ethical praxis of loving one's neighbour. It broke away from the tradition of the cyclic time and valued history and the freedom of human beings. It is not individualistic but communitarian. Kappen believes that this stage of religiosity is the higher stage of the evolution of human consciousness and is in harmony with the self understanding of contemporary human beings. In India Buddha initiated this type of religiosity, rejecting magic, myth, sacrifice, cyclic time and the caste system. This movement of liberation, like the *Bhakti* movement of the Middle Ages and the reform movements in general, got dissolved into the cosmic religiosity. Hinduism transformed Buddha into an avatara of Vishnu. It wanted to make Jesus one among Hindu deities, but could not because he is the supreme revelation of ethical and prophetic religiosity. However, the Christian theology and piety made Jesus too fit into a type of cosmic and Gnostic religiosity. Therefore, it is imperative to critique the traditional theo-centric Christian theology that does not have the power to challenge the existing dehumanizing situation and transform it.

2. A Critique of the Theo-centric Christian Theology

The Christian religious tradition, though originated from Jesus, the liberator of humans and their world, evolved into a theo-centric religion that would give emphasis to dogmas, cult and institutions. Jesus'

experience of God as his *Abba*, and his God-centred life enabled him to proclaim God, who is human-centred. For the God of Jesus human beings are more important than Sabbath, Temple and ritual purity. Kappen's critique of the Christian religious tradition is that it alienated Jesus through dogmas, cult and institutions and thus the liberative thrust of the Jesus' movement was blocked. Therefore, Jesus, the divine prophet of liberation, must be liberated from these shackles that Jesus can energize all those who are committed to an integral liberation of humans, whatever may be their religious affiliation.

The dogmas present Christ as alienated from the historical Jesus. He is made to pass through Greco-Roman mould of thinking. In this way of thinking he is fragmented into abstractions such as person, nature, hypostasis, body, soul, substance, quality, quantity, essence and existence. Kappen admits that the dogmatic statements and theological reflections affirmed the human nature of Jesus but in effect they denied him the status of a human being with all it implied. It was the Jesus of the theological concepts and dogmatic statements that was presented in catechesis. So in the popular belief Jesus was God under the guise of human and not real human. Cult further alienated Jesus from the company of humans and presented him as an object of worship and dogmas reduced him to concepts. Dogmatism can imprison the living God "through dead concepts and formulae derived from the fossilized systems of thought".¹ Kappen believes that Jesus must be liberated from this dogmatic and cultic alienation to continue his prophetic function of liberation.

Jesus of the Gospels is further alienated through Institutionalism. The picture of Jesus that we have from the Gospels is that of the one who rejected all forms of political and economic power that would dehumanize humans. He began a movement of liberation with the powerless poor and the marginalized of Palestine. But in the course of history the Church which was to continue the prophetic and liberative mission of Jesus succumbed to the lure of power and began to exercise control over every sphere of life. This resulted in the establishment of institutions which became instruments of domination. Thus, by a curious development, the Good News of liberation preached by Jesus became

¹ S.Kappen, *Jesus Today*, Trivandrum: AICUF Publ., 1985, p.11

the source of creating structures of unfreedom. Summing up his outline of alienation which Jesus suffered in the course of history, Kappen says:

He lies buried under the weight of accumulated layers of rituals, rubrics, laws, concepts, legends, myths, superstitions and institutions. He is bound hand and foot by innumerable cords that tradition has cast around him. His voice is smothered, his spirit stifled... Therefore it is the duty of all who cherish the vision of hope of Jesus to set him free from the prison –house of cult, dogma and institutionalism so that he can go about pointing as of old, his accusing finger at the scribes, pharisees, elders, priests and Herods of today.²

It is historical Jesus who is not alienated through cult, dogma and institutionalism, who can perform the prophetic function that can liberate India from its anti-human structures and systems. The Jesus who reached India was not the ethical Jesus but Jesus made into Christ, recast in the mould of magic, myth and cyclic time. Jesus as proclaimed in India was made to fit into this cosmic religiosity. Kappen says: "Landed on the Indian soil, he (Jesus) took more after Vishnu than Shiva. Like the former, he is solar (*sol invictus*), patriarchal, conservative, preserver of the world-order, proto-type and protector of priesthood, patron of whoever happens to be in power. Still, with his prophetic background, he could not be fully integrated to the Indian pantheon."³ Kappen affirms that, "His [Jesus'] forerunners are not the rishis, sages and ascetics of Hindu orthodoxy, but the dissenters and protestors from Buddha onwards. His blood must mingle with the blood of the Sudras, the outcastes, the tribals, the Naxalites, real or so called. We honour him best when we allow him to walk the Indian roads whole and entire... Jesus must remain the eternally other than the reality and symbol of total negativity."⁴

The task of relevant Christian theology is to liberate Jesus from the bondage of traditional theology itself as well as from the layers of rituals

² S. Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom*, p. 23

³ S.Kappen, "Jesus in the Indian Context", cited in *Religion, Ideology and Counter-Culture*, P. Mathew and A. Muricken (eds.), Bangalore, 1987, p.26

⁴ S. Kappen, "Jesus in the Indian Context", cited in J. Parappally, *Emerging Trends in Indian Christology*, Bangalore: IIS Publ., 1995, p. 185

and practices that are oriented to re-affirm a theo-centric theology that does not inspire or challenge the liberation of humans. Jesus of the Gospels without the trappings of dogmas and doctrines, rituals and institutions has the power to do it. Therefore, Kappen's plea is to set free the prophet in Jesus to walk freely on the Indian road to challenge the systems and structures that perpetuate dehumanization and exploitation and unite people of all religions and ideologies to work for the unfolding of all humans without excluding anyone, including even the oppressors and exploiters.

3. Jesus, the Prophet of an Anthropocentric God

Any authentic prophetic mission originates from a God-experience that transforms an ordinary human being to a prophet with a message of liberation to the enslaved humans. The enslavement can be due to a false self-understanding of their vocation as humans or due to the systems and structures of the society which exploit and dehumanize them. A prophet is called by God primarily for humans and their welfare as humans. A prophet sums up in his own person the past, the present and the future of the culturally disprivileged and the oppressed. He is taken hold of by God in such a way that God's silent presence in the community of the oppressed finds expression in the word and deed of the prophet. Thus in the prophetic break-through the point of arrival is God-in-Human and Human-in-God. In Jesus the prophet, there was such irruption of the divine presence and the eruption of the deprived masses. He was gripped by the vision of a divine-human community, which was to come.

What marks Jesus from his forebears and contemporaries was the way he understood the realization of that goal, 'the reign of God'. He said that the future had already broken into the present and human action has something to do with the course of history. For Jesus the realization of that future was not a possibility but a certainty. At the realization of this Kingdom humans would be liberated from all kinds of alienations. The Kingdom of God is identified with the Kingdom of humans where justice, love, equality, fellowship, reconciliation, self-emptying service and peace would prevail and all these values would flow from the experience of God who has humans at the centre of his divine life. It would pave the way for the full flowering of the human person. It envisaged the reconciliation of human person with himself or herself, with nature and with God.

Jesus announced that God opposed everything that thwarts the growth of the fullness of humans, namely, sorrow, injustice and estrangement from oneself. He recognized and affirmed everything that was human. The full flowering of the human person through a future project was seen by Jesus as present in his own presence, in word and deed. (Lk 11:20). However, he did not see the Reign of God present exclusively in his own person. It is present wherever one comes to the aid of his or her neighbour in love. Jesus showed through his life and message (cf. Lk 4:16-21) that the New Age is a task and a gift. God's purpose in history has to be realized through human effort. Its fulfilment is assured through Jesus by his continued presence.

The Kingdom of God which Jesus envisioned and proclaimed and for which he gave up his life was the Kingdom of liberated humans. The miracles of healing and exorcism were the sign that God was definitively at work in Jesus and in the history for the liberation of humans. On account of this he attributes the finger of God in all his miracles (Lk 11:20). He summed up his mission in terms of healing and exorcising. Constantly Jesus was referring to God, his Father, expressed by addressing God as *Abba*, as the one who is deeply involved in the lives of humans and their sufferings that they become truly humans.

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God in the context of a twofold cultural domination under which Jewish society was reeling. The oppressive forces were hellenization and oppressive Judaism with its cult, law and ritualism. The criterion for the evaluation of persons in this system was by the category into which they fall, namely, rich versus poor, great versus least, man versus woman, parents versus children, wise versus simple, and pure versus impure. This oppressive classification and alienation dehumanized the majority of the people. Against the backdrop of such inhuman discrimination Jesus preaches the Kingdom of equality, justice and love. The values of the Kingdom Jesus preached were subversive to the values of the society in which he lived. He was the prophet of a counter-culture.

Jesus stands out as a great prophet in whose word, deed and death the dialectic negativity worked itself to be full. His 'no' to injustice, religious bondage and cultural domination of humans is an expression of his experience of a human-centred God whose concern is to liberate humans

to pursue the project of becoming authentically human. His dialectic negativity finds its concrete expression in his life and death. He embodied in his very person in a unique manner the meaning of human life. In its openness to the Absolute, unconditional loyalty to the Reign of God, his resolute opposition to evil in every form, his courage to face the consequences of his commitment and his encompassing love for the poor and the outcast, he manifested what it means to be authentically human and how to attain it.

Conclusion

Sebastian Kappen's anthropo-centric approach to theology shifts the emphasis of traditional theology as 'God-talk' to 'God-talk about humans'. When almost all religions are God-centred the revolution that Jesus brings into religious consciousness of all people of all times since his arrival in human history is the revelation that God is human-centred. Therefore, the claim of all religious systems, structures and theologies, that they are God-centred even at the expense of humans and their well-being and are willing to sacrifice human life and dignity for the sake of God, is blasphemous and probably it is the only blasphemy. God of Jesus is human-centred. Therefore, Kappen is convinced of the relevance of historical Jesus and his message for the total liberation of humans in the Indian context. However, Jesus' tradition needs to enter into dialogue with the liberative elements in the Indian religious traditions and the cosmic religiosity in order to be effective and meaningful. In almost all his writings, following the Jesus' tradition of human-centred God, Kappen proposes a theological project that has the unfolding of humans as its central concern. In the context of growing fundamentalism in all religions in India championing the cause of God even at the cost of humans Kappen is convinced of the fact that the 'God-talk about humans' must be done in dialogue with those religious traditions and secular ideologies that take humans and their integral liberation seriously and propose ways and means to achieve it. Kappen's anthropo-centric theology challenges everyone to champion the cause of humans as the God of Jesus does in history.

Towards Theo-centrism in Inter-religious Relations

Journeying with Pope John Paul II

S. Painadath

S. Painadath offers one line of a systematic theology of inter-religious harmony with texts from Pope John Paul II. He shows how the theo-centric perspectives of John Paul II with the image, *we are copilgrims*, offers a wide horizon for a theology of cordial inter-religious relationships. S.Painadath SJ is the founder-director of Sameeksha, Centre for Indian Spirituality, Kalady, Kerala.

Picking up the spirit of the II Vatican Council Pope John Paul II promoted passionately the emergence of a culture of inter-religious dialogue. The Day of Prayer with the heads of world religions at Assisi in 1986, the numerous *pilgrimages* to countries having a majority of non-Christians, the close association with the spiritual leaders of other religions, the orientations given to the Secretariat for Inter-religious Dialogue at the Vatican, the respectful way of speaking about other religions in his encyclicals and other writings - all give witness to the passion that he had to promote a culture of dialogue and harmony among religions. Coming from the Polish Church he hardly had live contacts with believers of other religions. But right from the beginning of his Pontificate he gave high priority to commitment in fostering good inter-religious relationships. As a disciple of Jesus he was deeply Christcentred, as the Pontiff he was rooted in the Church, as a spiritual seeker he was open to the movements of the divine Spirit in all religions, and as a human person he was committed to integral human welfare. In his writings one can notice a sound theological movement between *ecclesio*-centrism and *anthropo*-centrism, exploring the depth of *Christo*-centrism and the width of *theo*-centrism.

I draw just one line of thought aligning some of the key statements of John Paul II on a culture of inter-religious harmony.

1. The Divine is an unfathomable mystery. No concrete revelation, no particular religion, no holy Scripture, no theological category can fully and exhaustively reveal the divine mystery. "If you know God, it is not God!" (Augustine). That the Divine is an infinite mystery is the beginning and end of every genuine theology. "We call God by many names, without however completely exhausting the divine reality, which is beyond us." (JP-II, Senegal, 20.02.1992)

2. God is Living God. God reveals the Godself throughout history, in all cultures and at all times. The entire history of humanity is the history of God's revelation / self-communication. The divine Spirit vibrates in the hearts of all humans and the divine Logos pulsates in the Scriptures and symbols of diverse religions. "Religions are many and varied, and they reflect the desire of men and women down through the ages to enter into a relationship with the Absolute Being." (JP-II, Assisi, 27.10.1986) "God is in an age-long dialogue with humanity." (JP-II, Rome, 13.11.1992)

3. The entire human race is the People of God: one divine origin, one divine providence, one final goal. "God wants all people to be saved." (I Tim.2:4) "The entire human race, in the infinite complexity of its history, with its different cultures, is called to form the new People of God. There is only one divine plan for every human being who comes into this world, one single origin and goal, whatever may be the culture in which one grows up and expresses oneself." (JP-II, Rome, 22.12.1986)

4. Human persons are endowed with the dimension of self-transcendence, with the spiritual quest. Hence people ask existential questions on life and life after death. Humans listen to God and articulate the experiences in religious Scriptures, symbols, rituals and moral codes. Religions are the expressions of the spiritual experiences. "Though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit, as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest for the full dimension of humanity." (JP-II, Red. Hom. 11)

5. The history of humanity is the history of the ongoing dialogue between the Divine and the human. This process has peak moments, in which there is an intense experience of God-man dialogue. This is articulated through a salvific event / a sage / a prophet / an incarnational form / a symbol / a movement ... A small community perceives this divine breakthrough (*kairos*) and evolves gradually into a religion. "The

divine Spirit is at the very source of man's existential and religious questioning. Hence his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time." (JP-II, Red. Miss. 28) "Christians should recognize the divine Spirit operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body." (JP-II, Red. Hom. 6)

6. Scriptures are composed from the collective memory of this divine self-revelation and human response. Since these Scriptures evolve in the course of the universal process of God-man dialogue, they form the common spiritual patrimony of humanity. The great Holy Scriptures belong to all of us beyond the religious barriers. "The Spirit *who blows where he wills* is the source of inspiration for all that is true and beautiful, according to the magnificent phrase of an unknown author from the time of Pope Damascus (366-384), which states: every truth, no matter who says it, comes from the Holy Spirit." (JP-II, Rome, 05.12.1990)

7. Each religion (and religious Scripture) has to be interpreted in the universal process of God-man dialogue and hence understood in relation to one another. The great Holy Scriptures of all religions form the universal spiritual patrimony of humanity. An inter-religious hermeneutics is needed. "The interior and mysterious workings of God's Spirit are to be recognized in the great religious and sapiential traditions of East and West." (JP-II, Vet.Sap. 94)

8. Each religion is different, and the differences have to be acknowledged. Each religion is conditioned by time and culture, by the historical factors and cultural forms. Each religion has to be studied in the respective cultural context of the believing community. "It is precisely because we often differ on certain important points that an attitude of mutual respect and esteem is all the more necessary." (JP-II, Rome, 12.06. 1986)

9. Deep within the level of differences in religions there are converging lines of spirituality. "Differences are a less important element, when confronted with the unity which is radical, fundamental and decisive." (JP-II, Assisi, 22,12.1986) "The action of the Holy Spirit, who in every time and place has prepared the encounter with the living God in all souls and peoples, is still at work today in the hearts of human beings, in cultures and in religions. It is the same Spirit who was at work in the Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work today in the Church. Every one's task is to discern and respond to the presence and activity of the Spirit." (JP-II, Rome, 11.04.1991)

10. Each religion is unique: revealing a particular dimension of the ineffable divine mystery. One religion should not be *compared* with another religion. "Loyalty demands that we recognize and respect our differences." (JP-II, Morocco, 19.08.1985)

11. Each religion has a universal message. God speaks to humans of a particular time but with relevance for all peoples, for all times. Hence it is important to explore the contemporary message of each religion (hermeneutics) "Interreligious dialogue at its deepest level is always a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity." (JP-II, Rome, 13.11.1992)

12. Each religion is to be understood in dialogue with others to explore the deeper significance. One needs a devout reading of the other Scriptures to perceive the divine Logos pulsating in them, and a respectful study of the symbols of other religions to understand the working of divine grace communicated through them. "Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man." (JP-II, Red. Miss. 29) "Authentic dialogue is accomplished by respecting and listening to one another." (JP-II, Rome, 03.03.1984) "I am fully convinced that the time is ripe in human history for followers of various religions to seek a new respect for one another." (JP-II, Colombo, 21.01.1995)

13. In a truly spiritual encounter with other religions, one meets the other not just before of oneself (inter-religious dialogue) but much more within oneself (intra-religious dialogue). Then the other will awaken certain dormant dimensions of an integrated spirituality within oneself. One listens to the Word of God in and through the other. "By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we open ourselves to God." (JP-II, Madras, 05.02.1986)

14. With the sisters and brothers of other religions we are co-pilgrims in search of *the height and depth, length and breadth* of the mystery of the divine presence within and around us. "God would like the developing history of humanity to be a pilgrimage in which we *accompany one another* towards the transcendent goal which he sets for us. Either we walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others." (JP-II, Assisi, 27.10.1986, italics added) "We are all pilgrims on the path of seeking to do God's will in everything. Let us

always be willing to speak to each other, to listen to each other.” (JP-II, Gambia, 23.02.1992)

15. In this pilgrim process we Christians share our deep Christ-experience with the others in an authentic and respectful way so that the others perceive what God has done for humanity through the person and message of Jesus Christ (mission). “In Christ God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of revelation and love.” (JP-II, Red.Miss. 55)

16. In this pilgrim process we also listen to the salvific experiences of the others, so that we realize the movements of the Spirit that blows where it wills. “We should have a deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows, where it wills.” (JP-II, Red. Miss. 56) “For the Church dialogue is based on the very life of God, one and triune. God is Father of all humanity; Christ has joined every person to himself; the Spirit is at work in each individual.” (JP-II, Rome, 03.03. 1984) “Dialogue is a path towards the Kingdom of God.” (JP-II, Red. Miss. 57)

17. Through inter-religious dialogue the liberative potential of each religion comes to the fore. Concern for the integral liberation of the human person, commitment to justice and peace, option for the poor and the marginalized and concern for the protection of the environment become the focal points of a culture of inter-religious dialogue and collaboration. “Only through inter-religious dialogue can the powerful role of religious faith be placed at the service of peace through the elimination of prejudice and intolerance.” (JP-II, Rome, 21.06.1991) “Inter-religious collaboration must be concerned with the struggle to eliminate hunger, poverty, ignorance, persecution, discrimination and every form of enslavement of the human spirit. Religion is the mainspring of society’s commitment to justice; inter-religious collaboration must reaffirm this in practice.” (JP-II, Delhi, 02.02.1986) “Christians will work together in order to bring about a more just and peaceful society in which the poor will be the first to be served.” (JP-II, To the people of Asia, 21.02.1981)

Editorial

The first encyclical by Pope Francis, namely *Lumen Fidei* (The Light of Faith) has attracted wide attention inside and outside the Church for different reasons which include the interest in playing a find-the-author game, as it is a church document prepared by two popes. It was issued as though to crown the Year of Faith. But there are other weighty reasons that drew many men and women to this papal text. For instance, it is devoted to a fundamental religious question, namely, how are we to understand faith. This question assumes crucial significance in a world which tends to dismiss religious faith as simply sentimental or irrational. This issue of *Jeevadhara* tries to make a theological reading of *Lumen Fidei* at close quarters.

Lumen Fidei shows a good amount of realism and openness, one of the reasons why it elicits wide theological interest. There are many memorable statements in this encyclical. One might suggest the following ones without pretending to be exhaustive. "Slowly but surely, however, it would become evident that the light of autonomous reason is not enough to illumine the future" (3). "The light of faith is unique, since it is capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence" (4). "Man is faithful when he believes in God and his promises; God is faithful when he grants to man what he has promised" (10). "Faith knows because it is tied to love, because love itself brings enlightenment" (26). The encyclical presents 'seeking' as a quality shared by all religious believers and by many genuine unbelievers. Remarkable that the word faith is applied to those who keep searching: "faith is also a way for men and women who, though not believers, desire to believe and continue to seek. To the extent that they are sincerely open to love ... they are already, even without knowing it, on the path leading to faith" (35).

Lumen Fidei seems to suggest four ways to augment the faith of the believers. The first consists in our capacity to see in the light of faith. There is an urgent need to see once again that faith is a light intended to

illumine every aspect of human existence. Secondly, intensification of our hearing. Faith comes through hearing (Rom 10:17). We need to tune anew into the Jesus' voice, calling us to follow him with loving, trusting obedience (Luke 8:21). Thirdly, the sense of touch. *Lumen Fidei* challenges us to open ourselves to the interior caress of Christ's love and to respond like the hemorrhaged woman in the Gospel (Luke 8:45). This touching contact happens, above all, through the sacraments. Fourthly, our memory. Faith is a living memory of the history of salvation preserved in the Church. We are also bound to remember the future (promises) in a present full of confident hope. The contributions in this issue deal with one or other aspect of the above said four ways.

These papers, in fidelity to the encyclical, make a double-edged negation. First, faith is not a hollow and dark sentiment. Rather, it has got a didactic content. Secondly, faith is not merely a deposit of credo to believe in. Rather, it involves a dynamic and personal relationship to God. It produces result. The word 'transform' is used more than 20 times in the encyclical with reference to the difference that faith makes in our life. For example, 'faith transforms the whole person to the extent that he or she becomes open to love' (26). Perhaps, the greatest service of this document is that it does not reduce faith to beliefs.

Faith has a happy paradoxical character. While the contents of faith transcend rational pursuits, they are open to human comprehension. Perhaps, a classical example of this awareness could be found in St. Augustine. He does not let the limitations of the human mind stop seeking greater understanding of God. For example, in wrestling with the problem of evil, Augustine does not simply say, it is a mystery; let us leave it. In book 7 of the *Confessions* using the arguments of Plotinus he proves that evil is somehow unreal. The same St. Augustine wrote in a famous sermon "*si comprehendis non est Deus.*" That is, "If you think you have grasped him, it is not God you have grasped" (*Sermo* 52, 16: PL 38, 360). This theological realism, I presume, must be the *raison d'être* for this encyclical on faith and subsequently for many theological works on *Lumen Fidei*, including this issue of Jeevadhara.

Mathew Illathuparampil

Radiance of *Lumen Fidei* - The Light of Faith

Tony Neelankavil

The metaphor of light radiates the entire encyclical *Lumen Fidei*. Tony Neelankavil in this article introduces this papal document basically building on the metaphor of light. However, he also brings out other metaphors used in this encyclical for faith such as journey, life, and memory. *Lumen Fidei* presents faith as divine illumination not just in the traditional dogmatic language, but in a faith-language that converses with people of various walks of life, even with those who are not companions of Church life. The author is professor of dogmatic theology at Marymatha Major Seminary, Trichur.

Introduction

Lumen Fidei, the much awaited first encyclical of Pope Francis, has generated great interest in viewing Christian faith in the Church from a vital perspective. Though the encyclical was published in the context of the Year of Faith, commemorating the golden jubilee of the second Vatican Council, it has a much wider scope than just reminding the Council teachings on faith. It speaks of the foundational dimensions of Christian faith and acknowledges the central role of faith 'to illumine our concrete human experience' and 'life in all its dimensions' (6¹). It was officially signed by Pope Francis on 29 June 2013, on the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, the two pillars of the Church. It was published on 5 July 2013. The scope of this article is to initiate a fruitful reading of the

¹ Numbers in brackets are the paragraph numbers in the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*.

encyclical. We hope an overview of the encyclical would help the reader to get a 'feel' of it.

It is one of the few encyclicals openly acknowledged to have been written by two pontiffs. While meeting the members of the 13th Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops on 13 June 2012, the pope announced that "An encyclical will soon be published which, so to say, is the work of four hands". He said, "Pope Benedict handed it to me, is a powerful document, although I will say that I received this great work: he began it and I carried it forward."² He acknowledges Pope Benedict within the encyclical itself (7). It is in continuity with what the previous two encyclicals on love and hope by Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, completing the trilogy on theological virtues. Pope Francis says that the draft of this encyclical was almost complete while Pope Benedict resigned. He only adds some of his contributions. The encyclical has a short introduction and four chapters.

Encyclical's Metaphor of Faith as Light in the Present Context

Introduction highlights the metaphor of light as the specific vantage point from which the encyclical approaches the notion of faith in the Church and its importance in the context of the contemporary realities. The metaphor of light is accompanied by an image of life as a journey. Jared Dees summarizes the encyclical's approach to faith. "Faith is the light that illumines our journey in life and provides clarity to all aspects of human existence."³

Speaking of faith as light meets with *oppositions from at least two corners*. First is in the context of modernity's glorification of reason. In the face of the tremendous progress in the lives of modern men and women brought out by reason, faith is looked upon as a dimension of past, undeveloped stage of human development. Faith is insufficient for the modern ways of living; it is irrelevant to a society come of age. Faith is thus understood as illusory light that prevents humans from a higher search for knowledge (2).

² Reported by Asianews.it at <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Pope:-now,-the-encyclical-on-faith,-written-with-four-hands-with-Benedict-XVI-28193.html>

³ Jared Dees, *The Lumen Fidei (Light of Faith) Study Guide. A Companion to Pope Francis's First Encyclical* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), p. 11.

The *notion of blind faith* is part of our Christian tradition. With the rise of modernity, however, blind faith has been understood along with the light of reason. Wherever the light of reason cannot reach, a leap of faith in the dark was proposed. This brought in faith at the mercy of the supreme authority of reason and reduced its relevance to a merely subjective reality. In response to this false prioritization between faith and reason, the encyclical argues that the light of reason in reality is not absolute; it cannot enlighten all aspects of human existence. Often, it ends up with focusing on fleeting realities. But an authentic Faith is capable of liberating humans from the darkness of selfishness and enlightening all dimensions of human existence (4).

A light of this capacity cannot come from any human origin; it is from God. Faith, therefore, involves *a genuine encounter with God* who can guide us to the light that illumines our whole life. "I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (Jn 12:46). St. Paul uses the same image of light to explain faith: "God who said 'Let light shine out of darkness' has shone in our hearts" (2 Cor 4, 6). The final words of the introductory paragraph of the encyclical succinctly presents the thrust of the encyclical's understanding of faith: "Those who believe, see; they see with a light that illumines their entire journey, for it comes from the risen Christ, the morning star which never sets"(1).

Thus the introductory paragraphs have clearly set the purpose of the encyclical, namely, *to recover the light of faith in today's world*. It is still relevant because it is capable of enlightening every aspect of human existence. On the one hand it is a light coming from the past because of its origin in the memory of Christ. On the other hand, it is a light coming from the future as Risen Jesus who conquered death invites us from a horizon of our future glory.

Light of Faith in the History of Salvation

The first chapter surveys the light of faith in the Old Testament, the New Testament and in the Church. *Abraham, our father of faith*, has a unique place in the history of those who were illumined by faith. Light of faith enlightened the route he followed. Here, *faith is linked to hearing*. Abraham lived in a context where divine milieu was perceived

in terms of powers and, subsequently, God was understood as impersonal power. However, Abraham heard a God who speaks. Abraham believed in a personal God who extends his relationship to other persons. Faith life of Abraham enlightens the interpersonal character of our faith - a personal God speaks to human persons and humans are called to respond to the one who called them by name.

Faith is a call and a promise. Faith sees what is promised to the extent that one journeys through the horizons opened up by God's call. This process has got past and future dimensions. It is not only a remembrance of the promises given in the past but also a memory of the future (*memoria futuri*) since the promise is on a hope in the definitive future. Abraham responds to the call and promise by faithfully entrusting and committing himself to God's call. The most important dimension of faith as human response is fidelity. Finally, the document focuses on the existential dimension of Abraham's faith. 'Faith in God sheds light on the depths of his being'. It enables him to acknowledge God as the ultimate source of everything that exists. Abraham believed in the promise of a God who was able to bring forth a son from the barrenness of Sarah's womb (Rom 4, 19). He did not revoke his trust even at the danger of risking his only son.

The *history of Israel* is in continuity with the faith tradition of Abraham; Israel trusts in the YHWH who promises to set his people free from the slavery in Egypt. Faith becomes a journey leading to the worship of YHWH and entering a covenant with him at Mount Sinai. Light of faith *enlightens the history of Israel*. Faith is linked to the concrete life-stories of Israel. Accordingly, Israel's confession of faith consists in recollecting the account of God's deeds in setting his people free from Egypt. God's mighty works were recalled and celebrated in worship and passed down from parents to children through generations.

Israel's history also reveals the *temptation to unbelief*, which is expressed in *idolatry*. While Moses was with God at Mount Sinai, people could not withstand the hiddenness of God and made an idol for themselves, a work of their own hand to adore. Idolatry is venerating the face which is not a face and thus forgetting the hidden face of God that enlightens everything. The inanimate idol does not speak to the worshippers but only set themselves at the centre. On the other hand,

the faith in the true God consists in the willingness to let ourselves *be constantly transformed and renewed by God*. Moses is the mediator of God's revelation to Israel. The presence of the mediator formed them into a community that journeys together. In the context of today's individualist and narrow understanding of knowledge, it is important to highlight a communitarian faith in response to revelation mediated by someone and shared by the community.

We find *the fullness of Christian Faith* in the New Testament. From the perspective of the New Testament, one notes that Israel foreshadows Christian faith which has its fullness in Jesus Christ. The patriarchs of old were saved by Christ yet to come. Christian faith is centred on Christ, who is the definitive 'yes' to all the promises of God and the ultimate basis of our 'amen' to God (2Cor 1, 20). Jesus Christ is the locus of God's definitive intervention and supreme manifestation of God's love for humanity. The clearest proof for the reliability of Jesus' love is his dying for our sake. Christ's resurrection confirms us the utter reliability of God's love.

Jesus Christ brings ultimate certainty to our faith. If our God were a God who is far beyond, our faith or disbelief in him would not have made much difference. The incarnation of the Son grounded God in the everyday reality of our existence. Jesus Christ, the supreme manifestation of God's love on earth, is not only imperative for our faith; our belief in God also unites us to him. Faith is not merely gazing at Jesus, but a participation in the way Jesus' sees reality- a gaze at reality through the eyes of Jesus (18). We become "sons in the Son". Thus, life of faith for Christians is a life of filial existence.

Christian faith has also an evidently *ecclesial dimension*. Since all those who believe in Christ make up one body, our faith in Christ extends to an ecclesial existence in which one finds his essential relationship with others in the body of Christ. By united in Christ, Christians do not lose their individuality but express their identity in service to others. Thus Christians profess their faith in communion with and in service to the members of the body of Christ.

The Light Shines... Various Dimensions of Faith

The Second Chapter explains the various ways in which the faith manifests itself in our concrete human existence. First, the encyclical

links faith with truth. This link is crucial because there is a crisis of truth in the contemporary culture because it considers technology as the only real truth. "...truth is what we succeed in building and measuring by our scientific know-how, truth is what works and what makes life easier and more comfortable" (25). When truth is taken as subjective, valid only for the individual, then it is not capable of being proposed to others for the common good. Truth as such – truth that is able to comprehensively explain our life as individuals and the society – is dealt with suspicion.

Such a *parochial view of truth has two dangers*: either one imposes one's subjective worldview on others crushing the actual lives of the individuals or leaves it as relativism. In other words, *fanaticism and relativism* are the two outcomes of a subjective understanding of truth. If there is no ultimate Truth, then there is no question of God; religion becomes not indispensable to know truth. The separation of religion from truth has led humans and groups to fanaticism, which becomes oppressive and even destructive to the vast majority outside the respective groups. The encyclical calls this *forgetfulness of the ultimate truth* with dangerous consequences as "massive amnesia in our contemporary world (25)".

Secondly, *faith is expressed in the Knowledge of truth and love.* The kind of knowledge involved in faith is that of love, of heart. According to the Bible, it is the heart which holds the different dimensions of human person: body and spirit, interiority and openness to the world and to others, intellect, will and affectivity. Heart is the place of truth and love, which transform the whole person and arouse faith in us that enables us to be open to love. Faith blended with love is capable of convincing us of truth and of illumining our steps ahead. The document takes up the comment of Ludwig Wittgenstein who compares believing with falling in love. Faith does have a personal love-dimension. However, faith is not a merely subjective, ephemeral emotion. Love's engagement of affectivity leads to a union with the beloved. This union can endure over time only when blended with truth. Without true love faith is not able to establish true and lasting bonds with one's own ego and with a shared bond with others.

Thirdly, *faith is articulated in hearing and seeing.* The covenantal dimension of faith entails a love relationship between God and humans. Bible presents it as a form of hearing. St. Paul's expression that "faith

comes from hearing” (Rom 10, 17) – *fides ex auditu* – is a classical expression of biblical notion of faith. Response of faith, therefore, becomes an ‘obedience of faith’ (Rom 16, 26; 1, 5) that is personal in nature.

Fourthly, *every faith experience involves a dialogue between faith and reason*. It is elaborated as a meditation on St. Augustine’s understanding of faith as divine illumination. Christian love speaks about God’s total love that illumines all reality. We are called to love God in return so that we may remain in faith, in the light of faith. Encounter of the Gospel with the philosophical cultures of the ancient world stimulated a fruitful interaction between reason and faith. Once we discover the full light of Christ’s love, then we are able to recognize the rays of light in the various loves in our lives. These partial loves also lead us to the complete self-gift of Son of God. In line with the Greek philosophy of light which insisted on sight, Augustine was able to see the light of God in all created beings. In line with his own struggles in faith life, it helped him to acknowledge the sinfulness and move towards goodness.

Faith as enlightenment in Augustine was not simply limited to a transcendental light that illumines all reality. It is rooted in hearing. Augustine could move towards an integration of the aspects of hearing and sight, constantly guided by the revelation of God’s love in Jesus. The divine illumination helps our intellectual search to wonder at God’s creation and focus on an ever widening path of harmony and understanding. Thus faith and reason are enriched by each other.

Fifthly, *faith is linked to ‘seeking’*. Faith always entails a continued search for God. The light of faith illumines the path of all those who seek God. Thus, a Christian seeker can very well converse with the followers of other religions at this level. The image of a journey of the magi reminds us that God’s light demands a response of faith in which one undertakes a journey of faith. This journey of faith is not only a journey of seeking but also a journey of God-experience. The path of all the religious men and women recognizes God’s providence very close to him/her. A religious person sees the presence of God in the concrete experiences of his/her everyday life. Since faith is a way, even those non-believers who are sincerely open to love and set out with whatever light they find, they are already - whether they recognize or not - in the path of faith. Anyone

who is set off on the path of doing good to others is already drawing near to God, supported by God's own help.

Finally, the encyclical reflects on the *relationship between faith and theology*. Faith is a light which invites us to explore the horizon which it illumines. It seeks an ever deeper understanding of God's self-disclosure culminating in Christ. It points to the fact that theology is more than a human enterprise of reason along the line of other experimental sciences. God cannot be reduced to an object. God is a subject who makes himself known and perceived through an interpersonal relationship. So theology needs to be humble enough and open to be touched by God.

Theology also shares the *ecclesial form of faith*. Its light is the light of the Church. Any theological endeavour, therefore should strengthen the Church, protect and deepen the faith of every member of the Church, especially the ordinary believers. As members of the Church, theologians must not consider Pope and bishops in communion with him, as extrinsic to their theological endeavour. Magisterium forms one of the internal constitutive dimensions of theology because it ensures the source of our faith.

The Transmission of Faith

The third chapter explains how faith is transmitted. Transmission of faith is taken in a broader sense – both from the transmission of faith as new evangelization and through generations. First, the encyclical explains the *ecclesial dimension of the transmission of faith*. The Church is the mother of our faith. Using the categories of hearing and seeing, the encyclical explains how faith receives a communitarian or ecclesial dimension. Since faith is hearing and seeing, it is handed on as word and light. The word once accepted becomes a response. When we speak what we believe in (2 Cor 4, 13), *our act of faith becomes a profession of faith*. This profession, a witness to faith, invites others to accept the word. Faith is also light. The believers, who see the glory of the Lord, are transmitted into the face of Christ (2 Cor 3, 18). As a result, the believers are transformed into the glory of Christ. The light of Christ shines on the believers as in a mirror and invites others to share this vision and be transformed by it. Faith is transformed, passed on through contact – from believer to the other.

The transmission of faith not only takes place from person to person but also travels through time, *passing from one generation to the other, through an unbroken chain of witnesses*. What certainty do we have that we have received the ‘real Jesus’? It would have been impossible to verify it if we were isolated individuals. But, we know, persons always live in relationship. Even our self-knowledge is relational; we know ourselves through our relations – our parents, language, etc. Self-knowledge is possible only by sharing a greater memory. The same holds true for faith. Faith in Jesus Christ is handed down to us through a wider memory, the memory of the subject who witnessed to the saving event of Christ – the Church. “The Church is a Mother who teaches us the language of faith” (38). St. John unites faith and memory and associates them with the work of the Holy Spirit, who “will remind you of all that I have said to you” (Jn 14, 26). It is, therefore, impossible to believe all by ourselves.

Passing on the Church’s Patrimony of Faith: Four Elements

How does the Church pass on the entire patrimony of her memory of faith, the whole store of her memories in a deeper manner. We enjoy a living contact with the foundational memory of our faith through the Apostolic Tradition, preserved in the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Faith needs a setting suitable for witnessing and communicating it. This setting must be proportionate to what it communicates. If faith were a pure doctrine, perhaps a book would have been sufficient. But what is communicated as living Tradition is a light which touches the core of our being and our relationships lived in communion. The encyclical speaks about four elements that pass on ‘the storehouse of Church’s memory’. They are the celebration of the sacraments, the profession of faith, the Lord’s Prayer and the path of the Ten Commandments (40-46).

Sacraments are the special means to make this communication of sacred memory possible, a communication that touches all aspects of our life and our communion with others. Through sacraments, our foundational memory becomes an incarnate memory, linked to our concrete lives here and now. The transmission of faith first occurs in the *sacrament of baptism*. It is not a symbolic profession of faith, nor a mere pedagogical tool. It is a dying with Christ and rising with him into a

new Creation. In baptism, we receive a teaching to be professed and a specific way of life to live out that faith. Christ's work penetrates the depths of our being, the incarnational structure of our faith transforms us radically and, thus, we are initiated into the Trinitarian life as the adopted children of God. The baptized are set in a new ecclesial context of shared faith lived within the community.

Sacramental character of faith finds its highest expression in the *Eucharist*, says the encyclical. The Eucharist nourishes our faith through Christ's act of self-giving. Eucharist reveals two dimensions of our faith. One, as an act of remembrance, Eucharist makes present the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and demonstrates its power to open up a future. Second, it is a movement from the visible realities of bread and wine to the invisible depths of reality, to a movement of all creation to the fullness of God.

In the celebration of the sacraments, *creeds* have a central place in transmitting faith. Creed is not only a profession of faith, it initiates the believer into the mysteries they profess; they are called to communion with the Trinity. One cannot truly recite the creed without being transformed by the reciprocal love of the Trinity. Two other important elements of the deposit of faith are the *Lord's Prayer* and the *Decalogue*. Lord's Prayer allows Christians to share Christ's own spiritual experience and see things through his eyes. Decalogue is our grateful response to the love of God that transforms our concrete lives.

Unity and Integrity of Faith

Having explained the various dimensions of faith and various elements through which faith is communicated to coming generations, the encyclical speaks about the unity and integrity of faith. Unity of the Church is linked to a unity of faith. Today's context finds it difficult to accept a unity in truth. People think that this would curtail freedom and personal autonomy. Genuine love, after the fashion of God's love, enables us and demands from us a true unity of truth. Unity of faith leads the members into the joy of being one body and one Spirit. Faith is one firstly because we believe in one God; secondly, because faith is directed to the one definitive incarnation of Lord Jesus Christ and, thirdly, faith is one because it is shared by the whole Church, the one body and one Spirit.

Since faith is one, it must be professed in all its purity and integrity. The encyclical emphasizes “the need for vigilance in ensuring that the deposit of faith is passed on in its entirety (cf. 1 Tim 6:20) and that all aspects of the profession of faith are duly emphasized” (48). The Church is entrusted with the apostolic succession to serve the unity of faith and its integral transmission.

Faith in Building up a Just Society

Chapter four explains the link between *faith and common good*, which leads to the creation of a society in which men and women live together in fellowship with others. Faith is not only a journey, but also a process of *building up a just place where everyone can live together*. Faith is not focused merely on building up the interior of the Church or an eternal city hereafter. Since the light of faith is born out of love of God, it strengthens the bond of humanity and is placed at the service of justice, law and peace. Faith does not move us away from the world; on the contrary, enables us to open up a space of love where the concrete concerns of men and women of our time are addressed. In the midst of conflicting interests or fear, faith makes us value the architecture of human relationships.

Encyclical then considers those *areas illuminated by faith*. First and foremost is the *family* which reminds us of the stable union between man and woman in marriage. True, this union is the result of their *conjugal love*, but, as sacrament, is a sign and presence of God’s own love. This is born of the recognition and acceptance of the goodness of sexual differentiation and, based on love in Christ, promises “a love for ever”. Faith helps us grasp the richness of *begetting children* as a sign of the love of the creator. In the family, the faith accompanies every age of life. Children learn to trust in the love of their parents. The *youth* experience the closeness of their parents and the Church.

Faith is a *light for our life in the society*. Attempts were made to build up universal brotherhood but they could not endure due to the lack of a *reference to a common Father* as its ultimate foundation. “Faith teaches us to see that every man and woman represents a blessing for me, that the light of God’s face shines on me through the faces of my brothers and sisters” (54). Faith extols the *dignity of human being* as

the centre of God's creation. On the other hand, the Creator also enables us *to respect nature* all the more, discern in it a grammar written by the creator. Faith also helps us *devise models of developing*, not based on utility and profit, but considering creation as a gift from God.

Faith teaches us to find *just forms of government*, in which authority comes from God and which serves the common good; it offers us the possibility of forgiveness that leads us to overcome all conflict. "When faith is weakened, the foundations of humanity also risk being weakened", writes the encyclical. If we remove faith in God from our cities, we will lose our mutual trust and be united only by fear. Our stability will be threatened. Therefore, we need not be ashamed to publicly profess God because faith illumines the life and the society and binds its members together.

As one of the final points the encyclical discusses the value of faith in the face of suffering. *Faith comes as consolation and strength amidst suffering*. Proclamation of faith often involves speaking of painful suffering, but it is often in proclamations in such weaknesses reveal God's power. The proclamation in suffering reveals Jesus Christ, our Lord who saved us through suffering. "Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey" (57). God does not argue with the suffering person, but accompanies him with His presence and gifts him with an enduring hope.

As the tradition of the modern encyclicals, this encyclical too concludes with a meditation on Mary. Mary is presented as the one who hears and keeps the word into the treasure of her memory so that the word could bear fruit in her life. Mary brought forth fruit of her faith and journeyed forward her pilgrimage of faith to its completion.

Conclusion

Lumen Fidei has beautifully presented how to recover the relevance of faith in today's world. It shows how the light of faith shines in our journey of life and leads us to a complete union with God. The dynamics of faith is in hearing and seeing the revealing God in Jesus Christ. The document has wonderfully addressed the current challenges to faith such

as individualism, relativism, parochialism, fanaticism, indifferentism and the like, but in a non-polemic manner. Faith in the Risen Christ leads us beyond the confines of individual existence into an all-inclusive community of God's love. The ecclesial dimension of faith is not a curtailment of freedom; on the contrary, it is sprouting as well as blossoming of one's life of faith leading to a complete realization of one's existence.

Scholars have tried to discern certain elements of discontinuity, identifying aspects which are dear to pope emeritus and those to the present pope. The externalities and temperaments seem to differ but their theological orientations, at the least expressed in this encyclical, can be seen as complementary. For example, the entire focus on faith as light could be identified as a thrust of the pope emeritus Benedict XVI because of its theological rootedness in St. Augustine whose theology is dear to him. However, the way Augustine's theology of faith as divine illumination is presented is not in the traditional dogmatic language, but in a faith-language that converse with people of various walks of life, even with those who are not companions of Church life. One may identify the concerns of Pope Francis here and also in the final chapter where the society and its concerns are the heart of all discussions on faith. They are not contrary to each other but remind us how the same light of faith is shared and handed on in varied ways addressing the needs of time.

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Lumen Fidei: The Different Faces of Truth

Idahosa Amadasu

The encyclical *Lumen Fidei* raised many interesting questions related to its authorship: one document initiated by a pope and completed by his successor. Idahosa Amadasu in this brief paper applies the larger question of continuity and discontinuity to this papal document. He convincingly establishes that what the readers have to look for is the different faces of truth. To search for opposition between the two authors would be a futile exercise. *Lumen Fidei* tells us that there is something much more common in their thoughts than we are made to believe by the media. The author, who has recently completed his Doctoral studies in Theology from KU Leuven, Belgium, is a Catholic priest belonging to the Archdiocese of Benin City, Nigeria.

There is something unique about the context of *Lumen Fidei*. While popes often try to show that they write in continuity with their predecessors, what is peculiar to *Lumen Fidei* is that it does not only signify a continuity of thoughts it is also presented as the work of two popes. As pope Francis had remarked, the encyclical was written with ‘four hands.’¹ This dual authorship is also openly admitted in one of the introductory paragraphs of the encyclical (7). But there is the claim that this is not the first time that we have such dual authorship of an encyclical by two popes. In fact, Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical on Love (*Deus Caritas Est*) is said to be based on a draft that Pope John Paul II began prior to his

¹ Pope Francis made this statement in a cut-off remark during his meeting with the Committee for the Synod of Bishops on June 13, 2013.

death in 2005.² But the open admission of the co-authorship of *Lumen Fidei* and the clear Ratzingerian/Benedictine lines that runs through the four chapter encyclical places *Lumen Fidei* in a unique position in the history of the authorship of papal encyclicals in recent Church history.

The title of the encyclical is highlighted by the contrast Nietzsche places between faith and understanding. In his letter to his sister, the German philosopher had admonished her to tread new paths and seek to know, in order to follow the truth. For Nietzsche, this path is contrary to that of belief which is simply content with having interior peace and happiness. In the assessment of *Lumen Fidei*, Nietzsche, by his admonition, places a wedge between belief and seeking, belief and understanding. It is precisely the opposite that the encyclical wishes to show: there is light in believing, belief entails understanding, belief motivates further search.

Anyone familiar with the Augustinian character of Ratzinger's thought would see how his theology characterizes the elaboration of the thrust of the encyclical in its second chapter. Nietzsche's position raises the question of whether belief is contrary to seeking, to understanding. Already in his doctoral dissertation on Augustine, the young Ratzinger had shown how Christianity's encounter with Greek culture revealed the intrinsic rational character of the Christian faith.³ This thought was developed further in his seminal work, 'Introduction to Christianity', when this encounter of the Christian faith was traced back to biblical times, "Unless you believe, you will not stand" (Is. 7: 9). In order to *understand*, one has to first stand, stand by faith.⁴ Hence *Lumen Fidei* writes about how the Greek translation of belief in the Old Testament moved from the biblical notion of trust in God to the Greek notion of intellectual

² Thomas Rosica, "Lumen Fidei The Light of Faith: New Encyclical of both Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI," <http://www.hamiltondiocese.com/news/2013/July/lumen-fidei-the-light-of-faith-new-encyclical-of-both-pope-francis-and-pope-emeritus-benedict-xvi>).

³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustinus Lehre von der Kirche* (Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1954, 1992) 7.

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understanding. The certainty that the Christian faith offers does not limit further inquiry, but rather, it is an invitation to such inquiry. This fundamental standpoint enables *Lumen Fidei* to highlight the link between faith and truth, experience and hearing, hearing and sight. These syntheses are brought about in Jesus Christ, and it is only when we are configured to Jesus Christ that we can receive the eyes needed to see him (1, 31). To be configured to Jesus Christ calls for a distinction between believing Jesus and believing in Jesus. By this distinction, the encyclical maintains that one would only come to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ by believing in Jesus and not simply by believing something about him (4, 18).

Since this faith in Jesus Christ is something we receive (41) and are called to 'live out, the third and fourth chapters of *Lumen Fidei* deal with the transmission of the faith and the social implications of belief. Two Ratzingerian favorite themes are discernible here. The first is the reference to the dialogical nature of the baptismal creed which places the act of belief in the context of dialogue.⁵ This dialogical character of belief brings out another familiar theme of communion in Ratzinger. Hence "those who believe are never alone" (39, 60).⁶ In the midst of suffering, God's ultimate answer is not to provide arguments that explain everything. Rather, he accompanies us (57). From here, in a manner typical of Pope Francis, the encyclical states, "Let us refuse to be robbed of hope" (57).

In contrast to most commentaries that too easily oppose the thought of Pope Francis to that of his immediate predecessor, *Lumen Fidei* tells us that there is something much more common in their thoughts than we are made to believe. The similarities that exist in their perspectives do not, however, blur the differences between both popes. For example, the style of the second chapter of the encyclical admittedly seems less like that of Cardinal Bergoglio. But the communion theology and the

⁵ See *Introduction*, 82-100, Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*. Translated by Mary Frances McCarthy and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco, CA: 1987), 21-25, 31-35)

⁶ See, Joseph Ratzinger, *Werglaubistmielein*. Freiburg: Herder, 2005. See also Benedict XVI, Homily at Inaugural mass on April 24, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato_en.html.

hope it offers in the midst of suffering shows something that the two popes share together. While Pope Benedict would arrive at this theology from his Augustinian heritage, Pope Francis tends to place more emphasis on the pastoral implication of this. This emphasis is pronounced in the message of hope and mercy that anchors his pastoral solidarity with the poor in the midst of some contemporary social malaise that he has often characterized with phrases like the ‘culture of exclusion’, ‘a throw away culture’ and ‘the globalization of indifference’.⁷ Perhaps one would have wished to see more elaboration of the Franciscan theme of poverty in the last part of the encyclical. Maybe the pontiff has left this for a future document. Nevertheless, he has given a hint of the theological foundation of his major pastoral goal in an encyclical that shows the different faces of truth in two popes.

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⁷ See Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, “Message to the Hindus on the occasion of the Feast of Deepavali 2013,” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20131028_deevapali-2013_en.html). See also Pope Francis, Homily during Visit to Lampedusa on July 8, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa_en.html.

Faith as Remembrance of the Future

A Christian Philosophical Understanding of *Memoria Futuri*

Martin Kallungal

Faith is inevitably linked to remembrance of the past and traditions. But *Lumen Fidei* points out that faith is equally memory of the future *memoria futuri*. Enigmatic as though it may look, this expression invites sustained reflection. In this article Martin Kallungal explains in general the future oriented approach newly developing in theology. He tries to prove that *memoria futuri* is a principle of knowledge which maintains the creative relation between the past (traditions) and the future (innovations). Martin Kallungal is professor of Philosophy and Theology at the Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Alwaye.

[...] faith would always be an act of remembrance. Yet this remembrance is not fixed on past events but, as the memory of a promise, it becomes capable of opening up the future, shedding light on the path to be taken. We see how faith, as remembrance of the future, *memoria futuri*, is thus closely bound up with hope. (*Lumen Fidei*, no. 9)

Introductory Remarks

In a secular culture that eschews faith as unfounded and unreasonable, Pope Francis in his first Encyclical entitled *Lumen Fidei* (hereafter LF) has made a commendable effort to clarify the structure, meaning and significance of Christian faith for anyone who wills to believe. While thinkers like *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche* (1844–1900) considered faith and truth as belonging to parallel pursuits, the Pope has not only brought out intrinsic connections between the two but also highlighted the former's foundation in love (LF 2,27). He discovers the foundations of faith in truthful love, and thus let the light of Christian

optimism shine precisely because he thinks, as he also wishes that everyone does, from the future which belongs entirely to God. It is through the practice of hope that one gets access to the future; and in that sense what *Lumen Fidei* ultimately evokes is the divine virtue of hope. The practice of the theological virtues of faith and love from the perspective of what Christians hope for is quite significant in the contemporary theological as well as general ecclesial life-context in which many seem to consider a re-interpretation of past traditions and practices for our times alone is sufficient for bringing about the fullness of Christian faith-life.

In the recent years, there have been some serious theological inquiries into the future and sustained efforts to develop a distinct theological approach based on such inquiries towards understanding the Word of God and world history. In the following, first, I will briefly introduce future oriented approach that is being developed, for instance, by Raimund Bieringer and others. Secondly, basing myself on the assumption, which I will also prove, that *memoria futuri* is a principle of knowledge which successfully maintains the creative relation between the past (tradition) and the future (innovation) I will make some preliminary attempts to take Michael Polanyi's heuristic thinking into theology.

Future-Oriented Approaches

If *the present* could be the locus of inspiration, as biblical theologians in the 20th century argued, then from, at least, a logical perspective, Bieringer thought, *the future* could also be the locus of inspiration. He found in the philosophical hermeneutical tradition developed by Paul Ricoeur some theories of interpretation of texts that confirmed his intuition. In Ricoeur's view, "the Bible is revealed to the extent that the new being that is in question [the new mode of being that the Bible proclaims] is itself *revealing* with respect to the world, to all of reality, including my existence and my history."¹ Bieringer finds this future-oriented hermeneutic quite sensible because this approach helps one to address historical and moral ambiguities in the biblical texts, especially in

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, (Evanston, IL: North Western University Press, 1991), 96. This passage made formative influence on Bieringer's effort to develop his 'normativity of the future approach'.

reference to patriarchal system and anti-Jewish stances. Following Sandra Schneider's line of interpretation of Bible, and in collaboration with Didier Pollefyt's research into the future of Jewish-Christian relations, Bieringer's future-oriented hermeneutic understands ambiguities in the biblical texts as well as in history as indicators of unwholesome situations from which we are saved by God, and at the same time as invitations for actions in view of establishing just relationships.

It is illuminating to note that Pope Benedict XVI has also made an explicit use of a future-oriented approach while he talked about Jewish-Christian relations in the context of the unforgettable crime of holocaust. He says: "This terrible chapter in our history must never be forgotten. Remembrance — it is rightly said — is *memoria futuri*, a warning to us for the future, and a summons to strive for reconciliation. To remember is to do everything in our power to prevent any recurrence of such a catastrophe within the human family by building bridges of lasting friendship." (See, Pope's speech during the audience given to the delegation of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations on 12 February, 2009).

The future-oriented approach to the past and the present is indeed a liberating approach. It liberates us, on the one hand, from the prisons of the past, from the unwholesome structures, from the glitters of impermanent stars, from the ecstasies of fleeting experience in the bare present, and on the other hand, it liberates us into a brighter future, into just actions for what we hope for, into new avenues of experience, and into the path of justice and love would make this world more livable than earlier and our life blissfully eternal.

It is important to assess if the future is indeed better than the past and the present; and this consideration entails that we address the question of criterion for future-oriented methodologies. As everyone knows the future *per se* is as neutral as the past and the present. Then, on what grounds can one say that the future is normative? Bieringer and his collaborators are clearly aware of the issue: "[...] the future as criterion is not *a priori* superior to the past or the present. Rather, constructions of the future can also be used ideologically in support of oppression."²

² Raimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, (eds), *Normativity of the Future: Reading*

This awareness necessitates that one strengthens the foundations of the future-oriented approach with notional clarity, criteriology, etc. Bieringer followed the matter in interdisciplinary research projects in collaboration with scholars majoring in religious studies, social ethics, and so on. Due to space constraints, we will not take up the question of criteriology in detail. We will address a more basic question, how does theological rationality work in a future-oriented approach? In the following we will make an effort to build on Michael Polanyi's analysis of the dynamics of knowing, especially in reference to humans' heuristic urge to discover.

Taking Polanyi's Heuristic Thinking-Style into Theology

In *Lumen Fidei*, no. 4 we read that faith is a "light coming from the past, the light of the foundational memory of the life of Jesus." This means that the act of faith has an element that comes from the tradition. Again, in the same paragraph of the Encyclical, we read that "since Christ has risen and draws us beyond death, faith is also a light coming from the future and opening before us vast horizons which guide us beyond our isolated selves towards the breadth of communion." Unlike the previous statement, this means that the act of faith involves aspects that we are still hoping for. Technically speaking, both immanent and transcendent aspects are yoked together. Such being the description of faith that the Encyclical gives, how can we understand the actual act of faith that all Christians are expected to make? Put differently, the issue is that the present is pressed to contain both the past and future. Let us see, if Polanyi's philosophical analysis of scientific discovery can illuminate us on this difficult question.

Usually, we tend to think that epistemic processes in scientific discoveries strictly follow the rules of observation, induction, and verification. But, in Polanyi's analysis, every scientific knowing has some crucial tacit coefficient, and therefore, scientific discoveries are made through tacit processes. There is always a tacit process that bridges the gap between a potential discovery and an actual discovery. What are such tacit processes? According to Polanyi, the basic structure of scientific discovery has to be sought in the fiduciary framework of scientific

practices. In that sense, the logic of scientific discovery is not that of absolute certitude but of belief.

His emphasis on the fiduciary act in knowing has to be understood as a corrective move against positivist tendencies prevalent in modern times. He is not saying that "faith alone"; rather his is an attempt to bring balance to our cognitive powers. He is not against critical rationality either. While he considers critical rationality as a greatly fruitful activity of the human mind he also thinks that a balance between critical and creative aspects has to be maintained. Therefore, he proposes a post-critical conception of rationality that also stresses the fiduciary aspect. On this point, a number of times he refers to St. Augustine who balanced the Greek emphasis on the naturalness of knowledge with the divine grace operative in the belief of the knower: "He [St. Augustine] taught that all knowledge was a gift of grace, for which we must strive under the guidance of antecedent belief: *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*."³ Like St. Augustine, Polanyi too suggests that "we must now recognize belief once more as the source of all knowledge;" and he goes on to elaborate on it: "Tacit assent and intellectual passions, the sharing of an idiom and of a cultural heritage, affiliation to a like-minded community: such are the impulses which shape our vision of the nature of things on which we rely for our mastery of things. No intelligence, however critical and original, can operate outside such a fiduciary framework."⁴

This means that a knower is not a "mere truth-finding machine;" one's personal judgment has a constitutive role in knowing.⁵ The tacit processes, like willing to work from within a scientific tradition, letting the intellectual passions take over, and allowing oneself to be corrected

³ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 265.

⁴ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 266. Recently, Lydia Schumacher has made explicit reference to Polanyi's insistence on the fiduciary framework of epistemological projects while exploring the future of Augustine's theory of knowledge which in her reading, "take the features of knowledge that could be described in terms of faith into full consideration." See Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 222.

⁵ Michael Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946), 15.

and confirmed by fellow explorers are meant to culminate in an event of actual discovery. But, the latter is not under the control of the discoverer; it emerges spontaneously. The unpredictability and spontaneity of the event of discovery are much similar to that in "the solution of riddles, the invention of practical devices, the recognition of indistinct shapes, the diagnosis of an illness, the identification of a rare species, and [...] also the prayerful search for God."⁶ He illustrates the last example with the experience of St. Augustine: "The report of St. Augustine of his long labours to achieve faith in Christianity, abruptly culminating in his conversion, which he immediately recognized as final and followed up by the lifelong vindication of the suddenly acquired faith, certainly reveals all the characteristic stages of the creative rhythm [like, for instance, preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification in a mathematical discovery]."⁷ That said about the role of tradition in an act of discovery, let us see what Polanyi has to tell us about the aspects that transcend tradition.

All efforts of a discoverer to actualize a potential discovery are simply preparations, but in view of a reality "which is felt to be there already to start with, waiting to be apprehended."⁸ In this context, Polanyi brings out the specificity of the heuristic way of discovery: "discovery is the realization of something obvious; a presence staring us in the face, waiting until we open our eyes."⁹ In brief, in a heuristic process of discovery there must be (i) a sufficient foreknowledge about what one is going to discover, (ii) imagination guided by an intuition into the final solution, and (iii) certain skill in recognizing the way the reality one seeks unfolds anew. Polanyi explains the last of these elements thus: "Intuitive impulses keep arising in [the discoverer] stimulated by some of the evidence but conflicting with other parts of it. One half of his mind keeps putting forward new claims, the other half keeps opposing them. Both these parties are blind, as either of them left to itself would lead indefinitely astray. Unfettered intuitive speculation would lead to extravagant wishful conclusions; while rigorous fulfillment of any set of critical rules would completely paralyze discovery. The conflict can be resolved only through a judicial decision by a third party standing above the contestants. The third party in the scientist's mind which transcends

⁶ Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*, 34.,

⁷ Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*, 34

⁸ Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*, 35.,

⁹ Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*, 35.

both his creative impulses and critical caution, is his scientific conscience."¹⁰

The "scientific conscience" is not to be confused with that of a detached observer or an omniscient superior; it is, on the other hand, the non-subjectivist yet personal conscience of the scientist who stands in and thinks along a wider tradition. The scientific conscience of a discoverer is rooted in the grounds on which the general premises of science stand. In Polanyi's analysis, there are two classes of premises that underlie scientific practices: "general assumptions about the nature of everyday experience which constitute the naturalistic – as opposed to the magical, mythological, etc. – outlook;" and "particular assumptions underlying the process of scientific discovery and its verification."¹¹ These are not, however, innate assumptions; rather they are learned by practitioners of science "by practice guided by intelligent imitation", just as is the case in other fields of learning as well.

The principle of imitative practice implies reverential acceptance of authority in the field. Part of what makes imitation intelligent is the guesses one makes about the reality to which one is introduced through the tradition. An intelligent guessing is a heuristic anticipation of the actual discovery. Reverential acceptance of one's tradition sets the background for a personal insight into the nature of reality; it is so related because without the clues provided by established practices and doctrines no intuition leading to imaginations would arise.¹² Once a discoverer thus succeeds (through intelligent guessing within an imitative practice) in penetrating the reality described by the scientific tradition he/she belongs to, such personally achieved direct contact with the reality will begin to evoke a sense responsibility to one's own newly developed scientific conscience. This newly enhanced conscience is not referring to the merely subjective feeling of an enthusiastic explorer; rather it is fostered, developed and disciplined through existing institutions in the field.¹³

¹⁰ Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*, 40-41., ¹¹ Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*, 42.

¹² In *Personal Knowledge* he says: "we can voice our ultimate convictions only from within our convictions – from within the whole system of acceptances that are logically prior to the holding of any particular piece of knowledge" (Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 267).

¹³ In the field of science, a practice of discovery is ordered through the "mutual

In brief, scientific practices are rooted in a common tradition upon which the premises of the former are established; yet, a scientific tradition develops thanks to the contributions made by original personal judgments on the part of its practitioners, which in turn evolves from mutually reliant and mutually critical interrelations among the practitioners who accept a common fiduciary framework. Put simply, one is committed to the truth one is trying to discover. The following text from *The Tacit Dimension* gives Polanyi's quintessential description of an epistemological event: "[W]e are guided by sensing the presence of a hidden reality toward which our clues are pointing; and the discovery which terminates and satisfies this pursuit is still sustained by the same vision. It claims to have made contact with reality; a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to future eyes in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations."¹⁴

The above cited text seems to tell us that the entire epistemological event is around a certain *reality* which is now *hidden* but gradually *revealing*. What one has achieved at the moment and what keeps one going on seeking to find (the now hidden reality) is an anticipatory sensing of the presence of the hidden reality. Can we not consider this anticipatory sensing, which at the moment has no guarantee for its truth, as the first feat the gradual revelation? The above text from Polanyi seems to imply so; for there is a claim about *contact with reality*. Contact with (through anticipatory sensing) reality "which being real [and] may yet reveal itself to future eyes" seems to decode what the Encyclical means by *memoriafuturi*.

However, there is indeed a difference between the remembrance of the past and the remembrance of the future, though both happen in the present. But, this question of the difference between the two can be clarified in light of the distinction between anticipatory sensing and actual revelation. Some of Polanyi's commentators have interpreted heuristic anticipations from the perspective of epistemological realism, which is not a tenable perspective as far as Polanyi's overall project is concerned.

reliance and mutual discipline among scientists" materialized in the periodicals, monographs, research grants, teaching posts, etc. See Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*, 47-50.

¹⁴ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966. Reprint, 1983), 24.

Perhaps, *contact with reality* is the vaguest concept in Polanyi, though it is the most crucial one as well. According to some scholars, Polanyi gradually abandoned the appeal to *contact with reality*, though he continued to insist on the reliance on the clues the hidden reality offers and the overall vision of the reality which are accessible to inquirers through intuition and imagination. It is not the immediate contact with reality that propels inquirers on the way to discovery. The inquiry is made, rather, in the "hope of making contact with reality."¹⁵

The right question, then, is: what is the condition of the *hope* that moves one to undertake an inquiry? Analyzing the lessons from the Copernican revolution in science, Polanyi says that hope comes from one's acceptance of the inherent rationality of the vision one shares. Still more precisely, an inquirer accepts the rationality of a vision and thus filled with a hope for that which this vision promises to offer because the inherent rationality of the vision has a power to claim universal attention. The quality to demand universal attention is ordinarily interpreted in terms of positivistic rationality of whose power consists in immediate empirical gratification and verification. Polanyi is completely opposed to this notion of scientific rationality. In his estimation, the power to claim universal attention comes from the, "prophetic" quality of rationality.¹⁶ What is important for us is not the order of causation between the powers of rationality, but that rationality has a prophetic quality and that it can make claim to universal attention.

Concluding Observations

Given the fact that there is certain circularity at the heart of all heuristic projects, one may be tempted to dismiss all such endeavors as self-confirming exercises carried out within the boundaries of a particular

¹⁵ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 5.

¹⁶ See the opening chapter of *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* where Polanyi assesses the objectivity of Copernican theory in reference to its rational as well as prophetic powers; and note especially: "when we claim greater objectivity for the Copernican theory, we do imply that its excellence is, not a matter of personal taste on our part, but an inherent quality deserving universal acceptance by rational creatures. We abandon the cruder anthropocentrism of our senses – but only in favor of a more ambitious anthropocentrism of our reason. In doing so, we claim the capacity to formulate ideas which command respect in their

intellectual tradition. If, “science is a system of beliefs to which we are committed,”¹⁷ as Polanyi puts it, then arguments of a scientist may also be eschewed as, “efforts to reinforce the particular groupthink one happens to belong.”¹⁸ But, as we know, this is not the case. Should that have been the case, then it would imply that one who dismisses a knowledge claim due its heuristic circularity subscribes to an uncritical belief in the all-sufficiency of external objective perceptions. The same applies to what the admittedly circular character of faith in the Encyclical (see chapter 2 entitled “unless you believe you will not understand”).

As the early medieval Hindu philosophers have rightly brought out, truth and validity of a claim can be verified in two ways: if both the claim and the process of verification are made from the subjective perspective, i.e., in accordance with the internal logic of the intellectual tradition to which the inquirer and analyst belong, then it is called “*svatah-pramana*.” On the other hand, if it is made from an objective perspective, then it is called “*paratah-pramana*.”¹⁹ The Indian philosophical views on verification range between these two extremes. In a similar way, the truth-value of heuristic achievements is also to be determined between the intimate certainty of individual knowers and the universal validity of the knowledge/experience in question. In other words, the truth of a heuristic achievement lies between (non-subjective) personal experiential conviction of the knower and its non-empirical capacity to evoke universal attention. In brief, there is a personal pole of the pursuit after truth which has to be verified at the individual level, and an external pole of truth which claims the attention of all, and hence has to be verified externally. Interrelating personal faith-experience and common good, the Encyclical says: “Faith does not merely grant interior firmness, a steadfast conviction

own right, by their very rationality, and which have in this sense an objective standing. [...] One may say, indeed, quite generally, that a theory which we acclaim as rational in itself is thereby accredited with prophetic powers” (Pp. 4-5).

¹⁷ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 171.

¹⁸ Aaron Milavec, “Polanyi’s Epistemology and Sociology of Science as Accounting for How Faith and Discovery Perform Embodied Heuristic Functions That Enable the Advancement of Science and of Theology,” Available from <http://www.ctr4process.org/publications/SeminarPapers/27-1Milavec.pdf>. Accessed on 12 November, 2013.

¹⁹ See Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy, Vol. 1* (Delhi: 1999), 796.

on the part of the believer; it also sheds light on every human relationship because it is born of love and reflects God's own love. The God who is himself reliable gives us a city which is reliable" (LF 50).

The key to the verification at the individual level is the heuristic passion for truth, which pushes the individual to prowl within a certain vision of reality one shares with the tradition where one finds oneself. Undivided commitment to the heuristic vision held by one's tradition is, thus, the starting point. Yet, in the course of the pursuit, one might develop an intuition into a deeper dimension of the same vision. If one is gripped by such an intuition into the beauty of a "deeper coherence", for instance in the case of scientific conceptions of reality, then one can accept it as one's "calling".²⁰ Now, it is the personal responsibility of the inquirer to bridge the logical gap between the current coherence of one's background vision and the deeper coherence into which one has had an intuition. Indeed, as *Lumen Fidei* no.8-9 reads, "If we want to understand what faith is, we need to follow the route it has taken, the path trodden by believers, as witnessed first in the Old Testament. Here a unique place belongs to Abraham, our father in faith.[...]The sight which faith would give Abraham would always be linked to the need to take this step forward: faith sees to the extent that it journeys, to the extent that it chooses to enter into the horizons opened up by God's word."

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²⁰ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 322.

Faith that Sees¹

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Faith as hearing and sight is one of the interesting themes of *Lumen Fidei*. Paying closer attention to this theme, this paper explores the scope of seeing in believing. This analysis is worth the attempt, for, believing without seeing traditionally exercises a sort of normative force in faith-matters. But the scope of seeing in faith is rarely treated. Building on scriptural insights, this paper argues that faith will allow us to see God and the divine here on earth and conversely, seeing will reinforce our faith. The author serves as professor of moral theology at Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Alwaye, Kerala, India.

The glory of God is humanity alive; but man's life is the vision of God (St. Irenaeus)²

A fifth-century patristic document entitled *The Sayings of the Fathers* narrates the following account. A pagan priest came to a Christian monastery and spent a night. When departing, he asked them, leading this kind of religious life, do you see anything of your God? Abbot Olympius candidly said, no. The pagan priest responded: "when we pray and perform our rites, God reveals himself to us. But you, after so many years of prayer, vigil and fasting, admit that you see nothing! Is it because that you keep evil thoughts in your hearts which separate you from the sight of your God?" The abbot reported these words to the elders and

¹ The title is inspired by Thomas Aquinas who speaks of *fides oculata*: *Christum post resurrectionem viventem oculata fide viderunt, quem mortuum sciverant* (ST III, q. 55, a. 2 ad 1). It can be rendered as "after the resurrection [the apostles] saw Christ alive with a sightful faith when before they had known him in death."

² Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 4. 20. 7.

said it was so.³ The question of that pagan priest has not become obsolete. Can the Christian faithful see their God in whom they believe, apart from hearing Him in the Scriptures? Is there space for seeing and believing rather than believing without seeing?

The encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (hereafter abbreviated as *LF*) has a section on faith as hearing and sight. The encyclical suggests that hearing God and seeing God constitute the functional components of faith. Taking this thread of *LF* seriously, this paper attempts to explore the space for seeing in believing.⁴ In this exercise, first of all, we shall summarize the teachings of the encyclical on seeing and hearing. Secondly, we shall explore briefly how the Scriptures present the dynamics between hearing and seeing in faith. Thirdly, we shall propose a few theological implications of the seeing-faith. In this attempt, be it made clear, we do not examine the phases of seeing, non seeing, and seeing again that interweave within the biblical "history of faith" (Jn 16:16-23).⁵ Nor do we treat the polarity of faith's seeing and non seeing.

I. *Lumen Fidei*: Faith as Hearing and Sight

LF nos. 29-31 deal with the dynamics between hearing and sight in faith. The encyclical claims that faith-knowledge has to be linked to the covenant with a faithful God who enters into a relationship of love with human beings and speaks his word to them. Therefore, *LF* argues, the Bible presents it as a form of hearing. That is why Saint Paul used a formula which became classic: *fides ex auditu*. That means, "faith comes from hearing" (Rom 10:17).

Hearing-Seeing duo used to enjoy a broad ambience where knowledge of the truth is at stake. It has been claimed that attention to

³ As cited in John J. Pich, "Seeing God," *The Bible Today* 38/4 (2000) 243.

⁴ "The light of faith" signifies the core of this encyclical. It is related to the illuminating guidance of the Spirit as, for instance, in traditional accounts of the "seven gifts of Spirit." We do not trace this line of reflections in this paper.

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, trans., Brian McNeil, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989) 295; Anthony Kelly and Francis J. Moloney, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist, 2003) 297-305.

sight was characteristic of Greek culture. The Hebrew mind allegedly favored hearing. *LF* rightly admits that this apparent antithesis is not justified by the biblical datum. The Old Testament bears witness to both kinds of knowledge. Hearing God's word is often accompanied by the desire to see his face. Hearing emphasizes personal vocation and obedience. Sight provides a vision of the entire journey and allows it to be situated within God's overall plan. This vision saves us from unconnected parts of an unknown whole (*LF* 29).

In John's Gospel the bond between seeing and hearing in faith-knowledge remains obvious. John makes it clear that to believe is both to hear and to see. It works in the following way. Faith's hearing emerges as a form of knowing proper to love. It is a personal hearing, just like a sheep recognizes the voice of the Good Shepherd (Jn10:3-5). That hearing calls for discipleship. Jn1:37 says, "Hearing him say these things, they followed Jesus." In the same vein, faith is also bound to sight. Seeing the signs which Jesus worked leads men and women to faith. John writes, "having seen what he did, believed in him" (Jn11:45). Conversely, it also happens at times that faith leads people to deeper vision: "If you believe, you will see the glory of God" (Jn11:40). In the end, belief and sight intersect: "Whoever believes in me believes in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me" (Jn12:44-45) (*LF* 29).

Along with hearing, seeing becomes a form of following Christ. Faith appears as a process of gazing. The result is that the depths of faith are revealed to us. A perfect testimony could be found in John the Apostle who in the Easter morning "saw and believed" (Jn20:8). He saw the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene saw Jesus (Jn20:14) and she declared "I have seen the Lord!" (Jn20:18).

LF affirms that there is also a suggestion of a synthesis between hearing and seeing in the gospels. The kernel of that synthesis is the person of Jesus Christ. For, he can be seen and heard. He is the Word made flesh, whose glory we have seen (Jn1:14). The early witnesses of Jesus Christ were able to peer into the depths of what they were seeing and to confess their faith in the Son of God (*LF* 30).

LF points out that Saint John speaks of faith as touch also, along with hearing and seeing. In his First Letter he writes: "What we have

heard, what we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life" (1Jn1:1). On our part touching Jesus becomes an act of faith. "In faith, we can touch him and receive the power of his grace" (LF 31). Commenting on the account of the woman suffering from hemorrhages who touched Jesus and was cured (Lk8:45-46), St Augustine says: "To touch him with our hearts: that is what it means to believe."⁶

II. Seeing God: An Act of Faith

After having briefly outlined how *LF* explains the dynamics between seeing and hearing in faith, we shall now turn to our specific theme of inquiry, namely, how seeing becomes an act of faith. The complexity and richness of the biblical data on what is seen and what is not seen demands deep attention to the phenomenon of revelation. We cannot examine such attempts made by recent authors.⁷ We limit ourselves to seeing as an act of faith. Exploring the bible, we come across two evident streams. First, that we can see God and secondly, that we cannot see God while here on earth.

Many a time the bible affirms that we can see God. There are biblical examples of men and women who saw God. The bible tells us that Jacob (Gen 32:31), Moses (Ex. 33:11; Deut 34:10) and Gideon (Judg 6:22) spoke with God face to face. Gen. 17:1 says "Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless." Ex. 6:2-3 testifies it further: "God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, Lord, I did not make Myself known to them." The

⁶ *Sermo*229/L (Guelf. 14), 2 (Miscellanea Augustiniana 1, 487/488): "Tangere autem corde, hoc est credere."

⁷ Anthony J. Kelly, "Faith as Sight? Toward a Phenomenology of Revelation," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 19/3 (December 2012) 191 suggests authors such as, Jean Yves Lacoste, *La Phénoménalité de Dieu: Neuf études* (Paris: Cerf, 2008) 134. Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 1 27. Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 178 216.

same faith is repeated in the words of Stephen the martyr: "And he [Stephen] said, 'Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran...' " (Acts 7:2). Moses and others also saw God: "Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel... Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank" (Ex. 24:9-11). Confirming the possibility of vision of God, Num. 12:6-8 says: "Hear now my words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with my servant Moses, He is faithful in all my household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses?"

Contrary to the above said examples, there are texts that deny vision of God for humans (Ex. 19:21); 33:20; Jud 13:22). Exodus 33:20 says: "But He [God] said, 'You cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live!'" In the New testament, John 1:18 states "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." The same is repeated in John 6:46: "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father." 1 Tim. 6:15-16 also shares the same conviction. "He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen."

As said above, many of the texts are unambiguous that God was seen by men and women. But there are also the "can't-see-God" verses. One possible explanation is that the people were seeing visions, or dreams, or the angel of the Lord (Num. 22:22-26; Judges 13:1-21) and not really God Himself. But the texts cited above do not say they were visions, dreams, or angel of the Lord. They simply say that people saw God (Ex 24:9-11), that God was seen, and that He appeared as God Almighty (Ex 6:2-3). If these verses mean what they say, it seems to create a contradiction. But how to address this apparent contradiction?

There are authors who assign seeing God a metaphoric value.⁸ There are others who vow for a literal reading of the texts where God is seen.⁹ One may say that, in the apparently contradictory verses, the biblical authors are struggling between the invisibility and palpability of God. This could be the reason for the inconsistency in biblical descriptions of theophany. Is 21:3 says, "I am staggered by what I hear, I am bewildered by what I see." In sum, one may conclude that the possibility of seeing God is real but it is not quite common.

Sensory perception of the divine is not ruled out in Christian tradition. For instance, Origen, Augustine, Bonaventure, and Ignatius of Loyola recognize "spiritual senses."¹⁰ Among other senses, seeing and hearing get the highest rating.¹¹ Aquinas insists on the biblical priority of hearing. According to him, in all revelatory experiences, hearing precedes seeing. In seeing the risen Jesus, the disciples hear the angels as heavenly messengers or the testimony of the women witnesses before they begin to see. He contends, in the general context, the hearing of faith is required if it is to lead to the beatific vision.¹² But we have to recognize, differing from Aquinas, that seeing and touching (1Jn 1:1-3) seem on occasion to predominate over the more traditional experience of hearing the Word of God.¹³ In the cognitive domain, there is a scope for "taste" for the

⁸ M. Carasik, *Theologies of the Mind in Biblical Israel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006) 43.

⁹ See for instance J. Barr, "Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament," *VTS 7* (1960) 31-38.; M.S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001) 86-93.

¹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics I: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva Merikakis, Joseph Fessio, and John Riches, eds. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) 365-380. For a variety of historical perspectives, see Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, eds. *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), as used in Anthony J. Kelly, "Faith as Sight?," 187.

¹¹ Meir Malul, *Knowledge, Control and Sex: Studies in Biblical Thought* (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Centre Pub., 2002) 144-151.

¹² Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 55, a. 3, ad 1.

¹³ Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord VII*, 273.

things of God, coming in the gift of "wisdom" - *sapientia* (from *sapere*, "to taste").¹⁴

Seeing God is a verbal expression of a captivating experience of God. However, strict boundaries among various senses in perceiving God do not stand. Perhaps, the classical example is the theophany at Sinai: "Now all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking" (Ex. 20:18)¹⁵ This text suggests a simultaneous multisensory perception. There are also expressions like "the word which he saw" (Is 2:1; Amos 1:1; Mic 1:1), "the oracle which he saw" (I 13:1; Hab 1:1). They suggest that no single sense can exhaust our experience of God. That could be the reason why the more comprehensive experience of "knowing" Christ in communion with the Spirit is said to include seeing, touching, and hearing (Jn 16:30; 17:3; 1 Jn 5:20).

In theophany narratives seeing God and hearing God are usually presented as two separate events.¹⁶ In such cases seeing is the initial event followed by hearing, explaining the sense of what has been seen. For example, Jacob's dream in Gen 28: 10-22 begins with a visual perception to be completed by an oracle. Thus they appear complementary. This practice could be the result of narrative sequencing. That means, initial seeing could arouse a sense of awakening leading to deeper message. Gen 18:11-15 serves as another example. Similarly, in Ex. 3:2 the visual scene of the burning bush is meant to attract the attention of Moses. It is followed by an oral message.

Once Abraham doubted Yahweh's promises, it was by means of seeing that he believed. He saw the stars on the sky. The same was the case of the Israelites who saw the miracle at the Reed Sea. Ex. 14:31: "And Israel saw the wondrous power which the Lord had wielded against

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 45, a. 1 6. Aquinas also writes, "Now God is neither distant from us nor outside us... and so the experience of the divine goodness is called tasting." Aquinas *Postilla super Psalmos*, 33, 8.

¹⁵ M. Carasik, "To See a Sound: A Deuteronomic Rereading of Exodus 20:15." *Prooftexts* 19 (1999) 262.

¹⁶ George Savran, "Seeing is Believing: On the Relative Priority of Visual and Verbal Perception of the Divine," *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009) 323.

the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord; they had faith in the Lord. And in his servant Moses.” In these instances, hearing the Lord and seeing the Lord serve communicating the message. Below we suggest three different examples which defeat any claim of superiority for seeing or hearing.

Ex 24:1-11: It recounts how Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and 70 elders ascend Mt Sinai to worship the Lord. They saw the God of Israel. They ate and drank. Their lives were spared even after seeing the Lord (24:11). In this theophany event the Lord does not speak. This event clearly established the superiority of seeing over hearing. It can be taken together with Ex 20:18-21 which shows people’s refusal to hear the Lord. Yahweh could be seen, although by a select few. His words will be communicated through Moses.

Num 22:2-35: Unlike many other theophany narratives Balaam has a verbal contact with Yhwh before seeing Yhwh in Num 22:31. The verbal message he received was sufficient to communicate God’s mind. It seems that the vision was to complement the verbal message. It could be that Balaam the seer, who was converse with many deities was not really moved by the words of Yhwh. Such a man needed the overwhelming power of a visual appearance.¹⁷

Job 42:5: The afflicted man Job says, “I had heard you with my ears, but now I see you with my eyes.” It is a surprising remark. For, there is no mention of a vision of God. Job’s experience of God has been primarily verbal. This passage may mean that so far Job had heard about God; but now he saw God in the direct communication from God. Seeing God is the first-hand experience of God. This text of course requires strenuous exegetical exercise.¹⁸

In the New Testament often the most direct form of sensing God “seeing” (1Cor 9:1; Mk 16:7; Jn 20:25; Mt 28:17; Lk 24:34, 39 46; Jn 20:14, 18; 1Cor 15:5 8). But the New Testament allows a larger sensory field of experience. For example, there is the disciples’ experience of hearing the risen Jesus speaking (Mt 28:9, 18 20; Lk 24; Acts 1:4 8).

¹⁷ George Savran, “Seeing is Believing,” 335.

¹⁸ George Savran, “Seeing is Believing,” 336-338.

They walked with him (Lk 24:13-28). There are instances of meals, in which he both eats and gives food (Lk 24; Jn 21:13; Acts 1:4; 10:41), as well as many other signs (Jn 20:30). The foundation of the faith of the early church in the risen Lord was initially visual. St. Peter recounts it: "God raised him up on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people, but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:40-41).¹⁹ New Testament scholars rightly claim that the "appearances" of the risen Jesus and the visionary experiences of the disciples are not purely subjective visions. They are the results of an interpersonal encounter in which the subjectivity of the witnesses holds true.²⁰

In sum, while holding that no one can see God the bible maintains that God is not a mere object of visual comprehension. Humans need revelation through the words of God and the grace of faith. The New Testament expresses the hope of seeing God fully in the afterlife. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1Cor 13:12). This is in fact a glimpse of the deepest longing of a soul.

The desire to see God is given plentiful expressions in the bible. The psalmist says: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps 42:1-2). David wrote, "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (Ps 17:15). Ps 11: 7 says that "the upright shall see his face." Ps 17: 15 expresses the hope of seeing God face to face. Ps 42: 3 asks, when shall I go and behold the face of God?²¹

In the New Testament Philip requests Jesus, "Show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us" (John 14:8). Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The Greek verb translated "see" (*horao*) is in a tense that denotes a future, continuous reality.

¹⁹ Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* VII, 356. See, Anthony J. Kelly, "Faith as Sight?," 183-184.

²⁰ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 209.

²¹ A. Weiser, *The Psalms* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 182.

Heavenly life is expressed in terms of seeing (and praising) God. Revelation 22:3-4 promises that "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve him. They shall see his face."

The deepest desire to see God face to face will be crowned in beatific vision in heaven. Strictly speaking, beatific vision is found alluded only in the New Testament passages such as Matt 5:8, 1Jn 1:5,7.²² In 1Cor 13:11-12 and 2Cor 3:18 admits the possibility of seeing God in this world, the fullness of which will happen in heaven.²³

III. Beatific Vision

Beatific vision is the traditional shorthand expression for heavenly experience. Heavenly experience is communicated as a perfect, blissful visual experience of God. No other sensory experience is ascribed to heavenly life. The Church teaches that the souls of the just "see the divine essence by an intuitive vision and face to face, so that the divine essence is known immediately, showing itself plainly, clearly and openly, and not immediately through any creature" (Denzinger 1000-1002). Moreover, the souls of the saints "clearly behold God, one and triune, as He is" (Denzinger 1304-1306).

Theological tradition uses the expression beatific vision by way of analogy with bodily sight. It is called beatific because it produces happiness in the will and the whole being. As a result of this immediate vision of God, the blessed share in the divine happiness. The beatific vision is also enjoyed by the angels, and was possessed by Jesus Christ in his human nature on earth.

One of the classical authors who has extensively written on beatific vision is St. Augustine. He wrestles with questions such as whether it is a kind of "seeing" that requires the aid of the body, i.e. the eyes. What kind of sight it will be? What will our resurrected "spiritual" bodies (1Cor. 15) be capable of seeing?

²² R.E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; Garden City, NY.: Doubleday, 1982) 424-425.

²³ Mark S. Smith, "Seeing God" in the Psalms: The Background to the Beatific Vision in the Hebrew Bible, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50/2 (1988) 183.

St. Augustine affirms that the holy people shall see God in the body. But he is not sure whether they shall see Him by means of the body, as now we see the sun, moon, stars, sea, and earth. He admits that it is hard to say that the saints shall then have such bodies that they shall not be able to shut and open their eyes as they please. According to him, everyone who shuts his eyes shall not lose the vision of God. In order to establish this claim, he brings in the example of the prophet Elisha. Though at a distance, he saw his servant Gehazi who accepted gifts from Naaman the Syrian, whom the prophet had cleansed from leprosy. The servant thought that he would escape the sight of the prophet. If a prophet in the world could see things at a distance, how much more shall the saints in the spiritual body see all things without the help of their eyes at a great distance? St Augustine follows the Septuagint version where the prophet's words say: "Did not my heart go with thee, when the man came out of his chariot to meet thee, and you took his gifts?" (2 Kings 5:26). In the Hebrew version it says, "Was not my heart present when the man turned from his chariot to meet thee?" The prophet said that he saw this with his heart, miraculously aided by God. But how much more abundantly shall the saints enjoy this gift when God shall be all in all? The Elisha story reveals that bodily things can be discerned by the spirit without the help of the body. For, when that servant received the gifts, certainly it was a bodily transaction, yet the prophet saw it not by the body, but by the spirit.²⁴

Confirming beatific vision Thomas Aquinas refers also to our innate limitation to see God while on earth. He writes: "man naturally desires, as his ultimate end, to know the first cause. But the first cause of all things is God. Therefore, the ultimate end of man is to know God." Yet, he also tells us that "...throughout this life God can be known in no higher way than that whereby a cause is known through its effect." God gave us an innate desire to know Him. But He did not provide us the means within ourselves to know Him. We require His assistance of divine grace.²⁵ That grace could be called faith. But faith is incomplete. For, it always implies some imperfection in the understanding. The believer

²⁴ St. Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. 22, ch.29.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 25, 11; III, 48, 9.

does not wish to remain merely on the level of faith, but to know God fully. Only the fullness of the beatific vision satisfies this fundamental desire of the human soul to know God. It is well suggested by St. Paul, "We see now in a glass darkly, but then face to face" (I Cor.13:12).

Before finishing his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas reportedly experienced ecstatic visions and declared: "All that I have written seems to me like straw compared to what has now been revealed to me."²⁶ He did not write any further, leaving the *Summa* incomplete. Three months later he died. It may look ironic that Aquinas himself experienced the beatific vision on earth after arguing that it could only be experienced in Heaven!

IV. Theological Implications

Reflections on the relation between seeing and faith leave many theological implications open. We propose a few below.

First, in Christian tradition communication of faith has been mostly on auricular terms. We heard and believed, rather than we saw and believed. The heard messages are further told and transmitted. True, the sacred scripture is a representation of the heard and seen things in the primary level. But in the secondary level, faith is created by preaching - in terms of the word. But there is genuine scope for seeing as an act of faith and seeing as a source of faith-communication. But seldom do we have testimonies of people having seen God, of course, leaving aside the privileged seeing of the early witnesses of Jesus Christ.

²⁶ As cited by James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co.,1974) 321-322. Scholars, hagiographers, and Catholics in general have not understood Aquinas's comment to be a retraction of anything he wrote. It is good to recall a comment of Martin Heidegger in which one may observe Thomistichues. Heidegger wrote: "At the interior of thought, nothing could be accomplished that would prepare for or contribute to determining what happens in faith and in grace. If faith summoned me in this manner, I would close down shop." Quoted from *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, trans., Jean Greisch (Paris: Grasset, 1980) 335 by Jacques Derrida in "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1992) 130.

A church which is focused on hearing and transmitting the heard messages is likely to be content with preaching the message, but not showing the message to be seen by others. In such a church the objects of faith will be heard but not seen. It is likely to lessen the number and strength of the witnesses of faith.

Secondly, we will have to address the most straightforward question: can we see God while on earth? A qualified 'yes' shall be the answer. We can see God while on earth but not in God's entirety. I depend on St. Augustine to support this claim. He argues that we do not believe, but really see that the living men around us, who are exercising vital functions, are alive. We cannot see their life without their bodies. We see it distinctly by means of their bodies. In the same way, whenever we shall look with those spiritual eyes of our future bodies, we shall then, too, by means of bodily substances behold God, though a spirit. Augustine assumes two possibilities. First: the physical eyes shall possess some quality similar to that of the mind, by which they may be able to discern spiritual things, and among these God. Second: God will be so known by us, and shall be so much before us, that we shall see Him by the spirit in ourselves, in one another, in Himself, in the new heavens and the new earth, in every created thing which shall then exist. Also, by the body we shall see Him in every body which the keen vision of the eye of the spiritual body shall reach.²⁷

Once we accept that we can see God in the world, the how question grows bigger. One may think that such a great power of vision could be temporarily communicated to the physical eyes. One such experience is exclaimed by Job in the Old Testament. He says to God, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee (42:5). St. Augustine holds that it could very well be the eye of the heart, of which the apostle says, "Having the eyes of your heart illuminated" (Eph. 1:18-19). The same Job also tells that "And in my flesh I shall see God." According to Augustine, it is a prophecy of the resurrection of the flesh. For, Job does not say "by the flesh." It is equal to saying I shall be in the flesh when I see God.

Another answer is proposed by Aquinas about the how of seeing God in this world. Examining the experience of St. Paul he asks: "Did

²⁷ St. Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. 22, ch.29.

Paul see God through His essence when he was enraptured?" He says, it could be so. Then this signifies that Paul's rapture involved a temporary transcendence of human experience, even under the influence of grace in this life.²⁸

Thirdly, seeing God and believing in Him need not be taken a necessary course of Christian life. One may live without ever seeing God on earth; one may see Him in a clouded manner. That possibility is recognized by St. Anselm in his *Proslogium*. Speaking to his soul, he writes, "But if thou hast found him, why is it thou dost not feel thou hast found him? Why, O, Lord, our God, does not my soul feel thee, if it hath found thee? Or has it not found him whom it found to be light and truth?" Later he adds, "Truly, I see not (the unapproachable light in which thou dwellest), because it is too bright for me. And yet, whatsoever I see, I see through it, as the weak eye sees what it sees through the light of the sun, which in the sun itself it cannot look upon. My understanding cannot reach that light, for it shines too bright. It does not comprehend it ... In thee I move, and in thee I have my being; and I cannot come to thee. Thou art within me, and about me, and I feel thee not."²⁹

We can read Anselm in the words of Jean-Luc Marion in this regard. He thinks that intelligence is at a loss to frame what has been received in faith into any conceptual system: "Standing before Christ in glory, in agony or resurrected, it is always words (and therefore concepts) that we lack in order to say what we see, in short to see that with which intuition floods our eyes... God does not measure out his intuitive manifestation stingily, as though he wanted to mask himself at the moment of showing himself. But we do not offer concepts capable of handling a gift without measure and, overwhelmed, dazzled and submerged by his glory, we no longer see anything."³⁰

Fourthly, one of the classical expressions of faith consists in believing without seeing. The most cited reference appears in Jesus' appearance

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 13, a. 2.

²⁹ *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, chs. XIV, XVI, trans. S. N. Deane (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962).

³⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, "They Recognised Him...", 149., as cited in Anthony J. Kelly, "Faith as Sight?", 192.³⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, "They Recognised Him...", 149., as cited in Anthony J. Kelly, "Faith as Sight?", 192.

to Thomas, the doubting Apostle. Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn 20:29). We overlook in this context questions such as how does that original “seeing” of the privileged disciples affect the not seeing faith of later generations which the risen Christ blessed. The words of Jesus to the Apostle confirm and glorify all people who believed without or before seeing the fulfillment of the promise and the promising God. As a consequence, we seem to have negated believing on account of seeing. The presumption is that if you see why should you believe? But in actual life not only that we believe and see but we see and believe. We have already given examples of people who believed after seeing either God or a sign from him. It is not a less valuable faith. Difficulty with many seems to be that we do not see in order to believe. Seeing things to believe happens only with the initial grace of faith.

Conclusion

The “not seeing” faith, though blessed, should not suggest that faith is a form of blindness or irrationality. Christian discourse permits expressions such as “the eyes of faith” and “the light of faith” and very recently, *Lumen Fidei*. When the risen One departed a “cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). The appearance of Jesus Christ to his privileged disciples exists no more. But “seeing” (Jn 14:19; 1 Jn 1:13), “non seeing” (Jn 20:29) and obscure seeing (1Cor 13:12) are irreducible aspects of faith. This makes us say with St. Augustine, *Habet namque fides oculos suos*—“For faith has eyes of its own.”³¹

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³¹ Augustine, *Epist* 120.2.8 [PL 33:458].

Open to Realities: Pope Francis' Call for Inner Reformation

Saji Mathew Kanayankal

Lumen Fidei has an overall pastoral undertone. Saji Mathew Kanayankal CST in this article tries to outline those pastoral and spiritual implications. He argues that this encyclical sheds light on different problems of the present Church and requests its members to have a self examination and to purify their faith and life. The most important theological merit of *Lumen Fidei* is its openness towards the basic human existence and different human situations. Pope Francis posits dialogue as a much wanted virtue of our times. This paper explains how the pope wants us to renew a deceptive culture. The author, who is a visiting professor of moral theology in different theological Institutes, currently serves as the Provincial Superior of the CST Fathers, St. Joseph Province, Aluva.

Introduction

Within a short span of time Pope Francis has conquered the world, especially through his gestures and clarity of thoughts. Many hope and believe that he will give new energy and vision to otherwise deteriorating Church.¹ Now the media observes Francis as a phenomenon, a force of nature who has raised expectations, upset predictions, created a new

¹ There are observations that Pope Francis is much influenced by the different findings of the concluding document of Vth. General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and Caribbean, (13-31 May 2007) of which Cardinal Bergoglio was the President. There is a strong warning against the gray pragmatism in this document. "Our greatest danger is the gray pragmatism of the daily life of the church in which everything apparently continues normally, but in reality the faith is being consumed and falling into meanness." Rf. J. Ratzinger, Situación actual de la fe y la teología.

sense of possibility, set tongues wagging and, in some quarters, sent anxieties soaring.² From his first speech onwards he calls for inner reformation and renewal³ and he underlines the need to clean up the 'leprosy of papacy'. As no person, without first transforming his own inner nature, can meet with any success in reforming family, society, or the world. The Church may not be able to give ample guidance to the modern world without making a clear renewal in its thinking processes and actions. Having a positive inner change, not only would make an improvement in its internal self, but also could change the entire face of present world. Through his first encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis invites the Church for a renewal, revitalisation and total reformation by opening itself to the realities of our time. As it is already observed, although officially it is an encyclical of Francis, which should reflect his teachings and ministry, it is the completion of an unfinished product of his predecessor Benedict XVI. In this sense, many of the favourite themes of Benedict, from the complementarity of faith and reason to the joy of a personal encounter with Christ are recurring in it.

Conference given at the Meeting of Presidents of Bishops Commissions of Latin America for the doctrine of the faith, held in Guadalajara (Mexico), 1996. Published in *L'Ossevatore Romano*, November 1, 1996. Cf. Concluding Document, General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and Caribbean, 13-31 May 2007, available at <http://www.aecrc.org/documents/Aparecida-Concluding%20Document.pdf>, accessed on September 11, 2013.

² Cf. The report in the *National Catholic Reporter*, 'Francis at the Six-month Mark Seems a Force of Nature', John L. Allen Jr., September. 13, 2013, available at <http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/francis-six-month-mark-seems-force-nature>, accessed on November 14, 2013.

³ See the first speech of Pope Francis, wherein he emphasises three things, walking, building and professing. He says. "Building: to build the Church. ... There is talk of stones: stones have consistency, but [the stones spoken of are] living stones, stones anointed by the Holy Spirit. Build up the Church, the Bride of Christ, the cornerstone of which is the same Lord. With [every] movement in our lives, let us build!... We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not confess Jesus Christ, nothing will avail. We will become a compassionate NGO, but not the Church, the Bride of Christ." 'Missa Pro Ecclesia' with the Cardinal Electors., Homily of the Holy Father Pope Francis, 14 March 2013, available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130314_omelia-cardinali_en.html

However, this encyclical sheds light to the different problems of the present Church and requests its members to have a self examination and to purify their faith as well as life. Published in the Year of Faith, it also recalls the 50th Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, which emphasised a total *aggiornamento* within the Church.

Open Towards the Realities and Diversities of Our Time

The most important theological insight one can clearly perceive in *Lumen Fidei* is its openness towards basic human existence and different human situations. In this encyclical, Pope Francis perceives faith as very fundamental to human life (LF, 18, 50, 51) and goes ahead to unpack Christian faith's true meaning so as to distinguish it from its counterfeits. One cannot deduce the different perspectives of faith apart from human life and its fundamental realities. As any other encyclical, it also sheds light to the fundamental dogmas of Catholic faith and its interpretation. However, while footing on fundamental theological visions, this encyclical opens the doors for free thinking and allows the rays of new thoughts in a wider spectrum. Without a critical awareness of the diverse and complex realities of our time and the situations of the people, one may not be able to respond properly to the will of God and the proposed evangelisation/re-evangelisation may not take place. This openness would help one to read the signs of our time, listen to the cry of the people as well as of the earth, to stand for justice and peace and to witness to the word of God in the contemporary society. It underlines the ability of the Church to welcome and accommodate the different thoughts of modernity and enhance itself as per the call of the times. It underlines the fundamental aspect of the Church with its entire reality. In spite of its mysterious sense as the body of Christ, it cannot claim any degree of extraordinary goodness, for this is composed of ordinary human beings with their own imperfections and limitations. As the members of human community, we should have the humility to accept our humanness, with all its shortcomings and sins and should be ready to let ourselves be transformed, renewed and sanctified by God. Though the members of the Church are called to 'transform themselves, it should not be tempted to make it as "the Church of the pure, the perfectly consistent, and expels all the rest", for, "the Church, that is holy, does not reject sinners; she does not reject us; she does not reject because she calls everyone,

welcomes them, is open even to those furthest from her, she calls everyone to allow themselves to be enfolded by the mercy, the tenderness and the forgiveness of the Father, who offers everyone the possibility of meeting him, of journeying toward sanctity.”⁴

In his later exhortation also Pope Francis speaks of the openness to Jesus in a very radical manner. Instead of exclusion and excommunication he prefers the concept of accommodation. For him, Jesus, who leads us to the Father is the gate (cf. Jn 10:9) and the gate is never closed, “it is always open and open to everyone, without distinction, without exclusions, without privileges”, for Jesus does not exclude anyone. In spite of the sins or shortcomings of a person s/he is not to be excluded from the circle of Jesus, because ‘Jesus prefers the sinner, always, in order to pardon him[her], to love him[her], ‘and he is waiting to embrace and to pardon. In order to have this deep experience, one has to pass through the gate of faith.’⁵ However, Pope Francis makes a clear distinction between the sins and crimes. If a person commits sins and repents the Lord forgives, but on the other hand the crimes are different and are to be dealt with in a different way.⁶ In its profound sense, the Pope is trying to bring back the ancient tradition of the Church, for from the very beginning onwards the door of the Church was open to accept the differences and divergences. For example, the first Jerusalem Council was broad enough to accept the gentile Christians with their own traditions and practices and ruled out any sort of imposing the Jewish traditions and practices (Acts: 15). Through the encyclical Pope Francis again underlines this broader dimension of the Church.

Dialogue - the Virtue of Our Time

The Pope observes ‘incommunicability’ as one of the crucial problems of contemporary society. Because of this incommunicability,

⁴ Pope Francis, General Audience, *Saint Peter's Square, Wednesday, 2 October 2013* available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20131002_udienza-generale_en.html, accessed on November 15, 2013.

⁵ Pope Francis, Homily on Sunday, 25, August 2013. available at <http://en.radiovaticana.va/articolo.asp?c=722638>, accessed on November 15, 2013.

⁶ Cf. Full transcript of Pope's in-flight press remarks released, available at <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-transcript-of-popes-in-flight-press-remarks-released/>, accessed on August 22, 2013.

there is a real gap between the Church and the culture of Christian inspiration on one hand, and the modern culture of Enlightenment on the other.⁷ As a result, there originates a lot of conflicting situations; these should not be allowed to create much separations and divisions, but must be handled in a spirit of truth and mutual respect. As people and their cultural ethos are different, there are possibilities of differences. Accepting the other is nothing but accepting these differences. The only possible way to accept the differences is the method of dialogue. Dialogue for the Pope is not a secondary accessory of the existence of the believer: it is, instead, a profound and indispensable expression.⁸ Individuals as well as society can eradicate prejudices and engender trust through dialogue.

For Pope Francis, it is the light of faith in Jesus that illumines one to seek God in a wider horizon and this search helps one to enter into dialogue with different religions and culture (LF, 35, 36). One who has genuine faith should be able to keep friendship and connection with the other, irrespective of his/her various convictions. In the context of developing scientific studies, technological advancements, philosophical thoughts and theological insights the Church should be open enough to accept the differences and diversities in the world. Claiming absolutism will not help it to have communication with the highly 'secularised' society and its various problems. When new questions arise, the answers 'have to be thought out according to the different situations, and one has to wait for them.'⁹ In spite of certain vagueness and ambiguities a true believer should be ready enough to be open towards the cultural and religious values of different people and social systems. As a genuine seeker of truth, the Church should know the minds and hearts of her hearers, their values and customs, their problems and difficulties, their hopes and dreams. In dialogue one enters into mutual understanding

⁷ Pope Francis. Letter to Eugenio Scalfari, the Founder Editor of '*LaRepubblica*' September 11, 2013, available at <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-letter-to-the-founder-of-la-repubblica-italian-newspaper>, accessed on September 11, 2013.

⁸ Pope Francis. Letter to Eugenio Scalfari.

⁹ Francesca Ambrogetti and Sergio Rubin, *Pope Francis, His Life in His Own Words: Conversation with Jorge Bergoglio*, (New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 2013), 48.

with a person of differences. Through dialogue people can recognize each other, build up unity in midst of diversities, and work for reconciliation and forge bonds of solidarity.

A genuine believer is a seeker of truth, which is 'greater than ourselves' (LF, 14) and dialogue opens the space for a common search for truth and to the core of realities. Here one has to accept a space, a space between the two where both can interact freely irrespective of the disagreements. In a diverse society, there is possibility that each one takes up the truth and expresses it from him/herself: from his/her history and culture, from the situation in which he/she lives, etc. This doesn't mean that truth is variable or subjective, quite the opposite. However, a genuine search invites us to be more open to the different realities, which is still unknown. In this perspective, one has to open to the wider horizons of reality through his/her genuine research. Genuine faith is a radical openness wherein one is able to transform him/herself and to accept the other in his/her totality. Here one learns to respect the other and moves along with the diversities of his/her situations. As Pope Francis claims, "truth makes him[her] humble, knowing that, more than our possessing it, it is truth that embraces and possesses us. Far from stiffening us, the certainty of the faith puts us on the way, and makes possible witness and dialogue with everyone" (LF, 34). In other words, "truth being altogether one with love, requires humility and openness to be sought, received and expressed. Therefore, it's necessary to understand one another well on the terms and, perhaps, to come out of the tight spots of opposition ... absolute, to pose the question again in depth."¹⁰

Renewing a Deceptive Culture

In spite of its openness, *Lumen Fidei* also focuses on the absolute faith on God in the present society. The culture that disregards God's tangible presence and his activity in the world may fall in total confusion and chaos, may lose its destination and would be like an endless circle, going nowhere. The contemporary culture, which is deeply shaped by 'Cartesianism' and the modern scientific and technological innovations, is in a deceptive mood. Due to the influence of modernity and new technological advancement, the realm of spirit is intrinsically disembodied

¹⁰ See also Pope Francis, Letter to Eugenio Scalfari.

and a kind of radical disrespect and distrust encompasses in human being's life. It denies the intrinsic beauty, goodness and truth in the original order and depends more on human achievements. This sort of desecration and rejection would gradually lead to a total denial of God. In fact, the modern society is not totally aware of the danger of 'building and measuring' only by scientific knowledge. The technocratic centeredness tempts us to make life easier and more comfortable (LF, 25). The indifference of present culture towards Transcendence and its negation of God would eliminate the sense of the sacred from the public square. Along with these philosophical dictums, the present eagerness for marketisation and consumerism forsake the age old values of goodness, generosity and cooperation and orient towards a purely economically driven society.

The rejection and negation of faith in Transcendence, precisely expresses human individualism and absolute autonomy in which we may close ourselves from the life-giving and life-sustaining grace of God. This is further geared up by the 'autonomous self' that prompts one to negate and deny the role of God in human lives and society and thus allows space for subjective truths of the individual which would be 'valid only for that individual and not capable of being proposed to others in an effort to serve the common good' (LF, 25). This would further develop an attitude of negation and refusal of God, which is fraught with anxiety, fear and worry. This kind of autonomous whims shrinks the spiritual and religious components of human existence and shatters the equilibrium of the rhythm of life and existence and alienate us from inner-self, fellow citizens and nature. When an individual, motivated only by his/her own self-interest, strives for his/her progress and welfare, others – living beings as well as nature – are commodified and objectified. As a result, what left is relativism, in which the question of universal truth – and ultimately this means the question of God – becomes irrelevant. It also paves way for fanaticism, which proves oppressive for anyone who does not share the same beliefs (LF, 25).

The falsity and danger of such autonomous self-determination and individualism and thus negation of God is another important concern of this encyclical. The Pope juxtaposes Christian faith, for instance, with our penchant for putting our trust in contemporary idols. He describes

this “as a pretext for setting ourselves at the centre of reality and worshipping the work of our own hands” (LF, 13). If any kind of good actions fail to realise that ultimate goodness comes from God, it ends up in mere individualism. As he points out, “those who live this way, who want to be the source of their own righteousness, find that the latter is soon depleted and that they are unable even to keep the law. They become closed in on themselves and isolated from the Lord and from others; their lives become futile and their works barren, like a tree far from water” (LF, 19). This gradually may lead one to turn away from his/her fundamental orientation, which should unify his/her existence. As a result, there will be a total disintegration of life and human being will be disconnected from his/her inner self wherein s/he fails to see the ‘connection between one and the other.’ This disconnectedness leads to an alienation from the deeper self and manipulation of soul as well as heart. As an effect, estrangement, resentment, anxiety, emptiness and horror encompass the human self. The growth of estrangement and alienation creates a sense of ‘not belonging to anyone or anything’ and feelings of bitterness, insecurity and restlessness grow day to day. In this competitive, tension- packed, hurried frenzied life of this society, people try to have rest and release from technological and pragmatic solutions such as joining athletic groups or recreation clubs, practising certain techniques of meditations, participating in fantasy shows or taking chemicals such as drugs or alcohol.

This technocentric view that admires nothing other than ‘scientific’ and celebrates the glory of technology ignores the significance of other disciplines and having no reverence and concern for any entities outside ‘science’. The separatism and human despotism that elapsed in the foremost philosophical thinking of modernity and post modernity and the scientific and mechanistic interpretation of the world that propagated a dualistic, hierarchical, individualistic and utilitarian approach have played the key role in the formation of contemporary life style that creates a disaster and a crisis in the society. Even though, many of these modern pragmatic processes and techniques may offer some temporal relief from the anxieties, they fail to offer permanent quieting of inner tension and restlessness. The Pope describes all these momentary and ridiculous means for ‘peace and joy’ as mere ‘idols’. “Idolatry” he asserts “is always polytheism, an aimless passing from one lord to another. Idolatry

does not offer a journey but rather a plethora of paths leading nowhere and forming a vast labyrinth” (LF, 13). But, faith, tied as it is to conversion, breaks one’s relationships with idols and strengthens one to make a personal encounter with living God. This encounter would lead one to radical transformation. It is a radical commitment of one’s total self to God and total entrusting of oneself to the merciful love of God. It is a total surrender wherein one offers one self to be ‘constantly transformed and renewed by God’s call’ (LF, 13). Herein lays the paradox: by constantly turning towards the Lord, we discover a sure path which liberates us from the dissolution imposed upon us by idols.

A genuine seeker of truth must be able to open to something prior to him/herself, ‘to a primordial gift that affirms life and sustains it in being’. Quoting St Augustine, “*Ab eo qui fecit te, noli deficere nec ad te*”, (“Do not turn away from the one who made you, even to turn towards yourself”) the Pope urges the faithful to turn to God and to acknowledge His presence and then be transformed to experience salvation and bear good fruit (LF, 19). Those who do not seek God are compared with the rich man (Lk 12: 13-21), ‘who runs after mere material pleasures having no face but full of dissatisfaction and agonies.’¹¹ Moreover, the tangible presence and activity of God cannot be set on mere radical otherness, something beyond on other level of reality, rather it is to be found in everyday relationships. One cannot actualise his/her openness or relatedness apart from this every day experience.

At the same time the Pope is also very well aware of the danger of absolutism. While professing his/her convictions, a catholic should not be adamant by shutting the possibilities of goodness from other people and their faith. Therefore he would see faith as a genuine search, a search wherein one is open to truth and love. In this sincere attempt one allows to be touched by the goodness that would also transform and renew him/her. When one is open to inner transformation and renewal through faith the whole person becomes open to love (LF, 26). We find the significance of Christian faith today in this respect. Here Christianity

¹¹ Homily of the Holy Father on the occasion of the ‘Day for the Catechists’ on 29 September, 2013, available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130929_giornata-catechisti_en.html, accessed on October, 15, 2013.

can open and enter into dialogue with modernity and post modernity, which is cramped conceptions of reason, equality and freedom, and which usually ends up emptying all these things of substantive content.

Transformation from the Foot of Jesus

The different sorts of disconnections and fragmentations and growing disjunction within the Church urge the need of a renewal and transformation. Rather than a movement from outside, this reformation should start within, from the result of a self discovery of our true self-the true self of the ethos of the Church. "A Catholic faith," as it is observed, "reduced to mere baggage, to a collection of rules and prohibitions, to fragmented devotional practices, to selective and partial adherence to the truths of the faith, to occasional participation in some sacraments, to the repetition of doctrinal principles, to bland or nervous moralizing, that does not convert the life of the baptized would not withstand the trials of time."¹² The Church has a moral responsibility to open to the different life experiences of today. In the face of many painful questions posed by the suffering, violence, discrimination and poverty the Church has the responsibility to take an active role in establishing justice and peace. When people are in a desperate situation, she encourages them to go ahead with faith and hope. Here the Pope exemplifies the faith of Israel, who journeyed towards the Promised Land, putting their trust in God, who assured to set his people free from their misery (LF, 12). The journey of a faithful is compared with the journey of Abraham the father of faith, who has made his journey, not because his ways were clear but with a faith, that helped him to take every step forward and he moved every step 'to the extent that it chooses to enter into the horizons opened up by God's word' (LF, 8-11).

Faith itself invites us for a radical renewal which further calls the faithful towards 'metanoia' which means repentance and change. It calls for a change of mind, a new way of thinking, a complete reversal of perspective, and a radical alteration of self-image. An authentic repentance and renewal do not jettison the past; rather it reclaims it. In this process, the members of the Church have the moral responsibility to

¹² Concluding Document, General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and Caribbean.

make a re-search into their own life, vision and practices. It is a deeper experience of the people of God to encounter God with their faith, which leads to the transformation of their total self. In this process of renewal one has to look beyond him/herself, and make a genuine search into the authentic source of happiness and joy which would help him/herself to see things differently. For this renewal the Pope invites the faithful to go back to Jesus, the authentic source of Christian living (LF, 18).

From this perspective, he would see faith as the essential power that leads to the transformation of the total faithful, which would be actualised with a true "encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives" (LF, 4). For him, this encounter is not a participation in some arranged programmes or adherence to certain dogmas or practises of holy rituals; rather it is a radical acceptance of Jesus into one's life. "Faith" he claims, "does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them, with his own eyes: it is a participation in his way of seeing" (LF, 18). This vision would enable one to see things in a new way for it is an 'encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.'¹³ Through this encounter "our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us, a love that transforms us from within, acting in us and through us" (LF, 20). Transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see; we realize that it contains a great promise of fulfilment, and that a vision of the future opens up before us. Thus s/he who leaves her/himself totally to God through faith, experiences peace and tranquillity, and s/he could invite the entire human community to share the same experience.

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¹³ Cf. Concluding Document, General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and Caribbean.

Lumen Fidei: Attitude towards Other Religions

Vincent Kundukulam

I am asked to review the Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (LF) of Pope Francis from the perspective of Theology of Religions. It seems to me that, to be frank, the document does not come from the heart of the present Pope for the simple reason that it does not create the warmth and depth of his speeches to which we are accustomed to since the inception of his pontificate. Secondly, searching for a theology of religion in this document is like looking for a needle in a haystack, because the questions regarding the uniqueness of Christ, unicity of the Church and attitude towards other religious cultures are not the major concerns of the Encyclical. None of the four chapters nor any of the sub-headings is dedicated to address such questions. However we can identify some passages that suggest themes discussing the relationship between Church and other religions.

The objective of this article is nothing but to expose briefly the Encyclical's attitude towards literature and philosophy, the main currents in the theology of religions that the LF manifests, the theological insights it holds to promote openness towards other religions and the vision it endorses regarding the ways of evangelization, the subjects that are alive in Church's dialogue with "others".

1. Literature and Philosophy

The document is rich in its references to literature and philosophy. Among them the literary references are most often approached positively. For example, while speaking of 'faith as light' Pope writes: "Faith does

not dwell in shadow and gloom; it is a light for our darkness. Dante in the *Divine Comedy* after professing his faith to Saint Peter, describes that light as a "spark which then becomes a burning flame and like a heavenly star within me glimmers" (no: 4). Here Dante's passages are used by Pope to highlight the secret light of faith inherent in man, which helps him in the journey through the darkness of the world.

To explain the manner in which the light of faith reaches out to people on earth, Pope borrows the imagery of sun coming through the windows made of glass-paintings in the churches. He writes: "Light of faith is linked to concrete life-stories, to the grateful remembrance of God's mighty deed and the progressive fulfillment of his promises. Gothic architecture gave clear expression to the light coming down from heaven by passing through windows depicting the history of salvation" (no: 12). Another example for the creative use of literature in theological reflection would be the remark about T.S. Eliot. Pope mentions this literary critic and poet to point out how the foundations of life risk being weakened when faith is weakened. Eliot asks: "Do you need to be told that even those modest attainments as you can boast in the way of polite society will hardly survive the faith to which they owe their significance?." After citing this, Pope continues: "If we remove faith in God from our cities, mutual trust would be weakened, we would remain united only by fear and our stability would be threatened" (no: 55).

But the references to philosophers in LF are employed with negative insinuations. They are referred just to divulge their ethical discrepancy and to affirm the excellence of Christian faith. For instance, the document recalls the lamentation of Jacques Rousseau about the absence of God in his life: "How many people stand between God and me ... Is it really so simple and natural that God would have sought out Moses in order to speak to Jean Jacques Rousseau?" After this quote, the LF comments saying that "one cannot appreciate the significance of mediation and the capacity to participate in the vision of another, which is proper to love, on the basis of an individualistic conception of knowledge" (no: 14). Similarly the allusion to Ludwig Wittgenstein ends with a pessimistic note: "For Wittgenstein, believing can be compared to the experience of falling in love: it is something subjective which cannot be proposed as a truth valid for everyone. Indeed most people nowadays would not consider

love as related in any way to truth. Love is seen as an experience associated with the world of fleeting emotions, no longer with truth. But is this an authentic description of love? Love cannot be reduced to an ephemeral emotion” (no: 27).

2. Pagan Culture

One of the direct references of the document to the pagan world is about Celsus who lived in the second century. He seems to have reproached Christians for an idea that he considered foolishness and delusion namely that God created the world for man, setting human beings at the pinnacle of the entire cosmos: “why claim that grass grows for the benefit of man, rather than for that of the most savage of the brute beasts?” “If we look down to earth from the heights of heaven, would there really be any difference between our activities and those of the ants and bees?” This allusion to Celsus is followed by sentences which ascertain the higher vision of Bible about man. ‘Human life is precious and unique compared to other created beings. God has special love and concern for every person. Man loses his place in the universe either renouncing his proper moral responsibility or else presuming to be a sort of absolute judge endowed with an unlimited power to manipulate the world around him’. (no: 54) Here, the LF does not expressly tarnish the image of the pagan belief but makes use of a case from that world to embody a vision which has to be devalued before affirming the superiority of Christian revelation in that regard.

But concerning idolatry the document projects a totally pessimistic attitude. It says: “idolatry is when a face addresses a face which is not a face. In place of faith in God, it seems better to worship an idol, into whose face we can look directly and whose origin we know, because it is the work of our own hands. Before an idol there is no risk that we will be called to abandon our security, for idols have mouths, but they cannot speak (Ps 115:5) Idol exists as a pretext for setting ourselves at the center of reality and worshipping the work of our own hands. Idolatry is always polytheism, an aimless passing from one lord to another. Idolatry does not offer a journey but rather a plethora of paths leading nowhere and forming a vast labyrinth” (no: 13).

The above-given discourse resonates in me the outlook of some foreign missionaries in India, who were making rash comments about

the 'idol-worship' of the Hindus without understanding its symbolic value. The educated Hindus do not equate the idols made of rock or gold with gods; they venerate them only as icons manifesting different attributes of the Absolute. In conversing with missionaries Mahatma Gandhi once said: 'we may think that the lower castes and tribals adore created beings or statues. In fact they adore nothing else than God in those objects.' However, the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (no: 16) keeps a generous attitude towards the veneration of the Divine through the symbols and signs: "Nor is God remote from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, since he gives to all men life and breadth and all things (Act 17, 25-28), and since the Saviour wills all men to be saved (I Tim 2, 4)".

3. Christocentrism

Different schools of thought are developed in the theology of religions to translate Church's attitudes towards other religions like Ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism, Theocentrism, Pneumatocentrism and Soteriocentrism. Needless to say, each of them contains several nuanced positions within. As far as LF is concerned, its visions are Christocentric, but they swing between the theology of fulfillment and the theology of salvific presence.

3.1 Theology of accomplishment or fulfillment

This is advocated by the French theologian Henri de Lubac, the author of *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Eglise*. He maintained that non-Christian religions are natural religions and they are oriented towards Christianity, which is the supernatural religion. Redemptive grace will be made available to the righteous people in other religions but that is not on account of the merit of the spiritual richness in those religions. According to this view, the other religions do not enjoy any role in God's plan of salvation (Jacques Dupuis, *Pluralisme religieux et mission évangélisatrice de l'Eglise*, in: *Spiritus*, vol. 32, n° 122, février 1991, p. 70).

In the very first number of the LF we read as follows: "The pagan world, which hungered for light had seen the growth of the cult of the sun God, *Sol Invictus*, invoked each day at sunrise. Yet though the sun was born anew each morning, it was clearly incapable of casting its light on all human existence. The sun does not illumine all reality; its rays cannot penetrate to the shadow of death, the place where men's eyes

are closed to its light. No one – Saint Justin Martyr writes – has ever been ready to die for his faith in the sun. Conscious of the immense horizon which their faith opened before them, Christian invoked Jesus as the true sun whose rays bestow life’. (no: 1)

In the above text, by way of comparing the contingent nature of sunlight with the power of the light of faith that surpasses death; the pagan culture is depicted as inferior to Christian faith. This has always been a comfortable position adopted by the traditionalists in the Church as it affirms very clearly the supremacy of the Christian faith over other belief systems. But at present, this mind-set is not welcomed in the circle of inter religious dialogue because an authentic dialogue presumes that its participants are equally valued and respected.

3.2 *Inclusive Christocentrism*

The theology of accomplishment was considered progressive until the Second Vatican Council. But, Karl Rahner, one of the most influential theologians of the time, proposed a more inclusive Christocentric vision according to which the other religions may possess the capacity to mediate grace to their respective believers in matters coherent with gospel message provided they receive it from Christ (Karl Rahner, *Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions*, in: *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, Longman and Todd, London, 1966, pp. 115-134). There are several passages in the LF that fall in line with this stream of thought. Most of them are in the numbers 32 – 35, which articulate the interconnectedness among faith, reason and search for God.

In number 33, Pope refers to St. Augustine who, due to his encounter with Neo-platonism, discovered that the paradigm of the light which, descending from on high to illumine all reality, is a symbol of God. “Augustine thus came to appreciate God’s transcendence and discovered that all things have a certain transparency, that they can reflect God’s goodness”. This allusion to the transcendental facet inherent in all creatures is in consonance with the theology of creation depicted in Gen 1, 27 and the prologue of St. John (1, 1-4). Since everybody is created in the image and likeness of God and through the Word, the righteous men and women, irrespective of creed or nation, are liable to possess the grace needed to lead a life worthy of attaining salvation.

Another example can be taken from the same number where Pope shows the secret link that exists between the seekers of God and the Christians: "Because faith is a way, it also has to do with the lives of those men and women who, though not believers, nonetheless desire to believe and continue to seek. To the extent that they are sincerely open to love and set out with whatever light they can find, they are already, even without knowing it on the path of leading to faith. Anyone who sets off on the path of doing good to others is already drawing near to God, is already sustained by his help for it is the characteristic of the divine light to brighten our eyes whenever we walk towards the fullness of love" (no: 35). The perception that 'the non-believers practicing charity with good intention are assisted by God in their journey towards salvation' is not entirely a novel concept. It was already in the Second Vatican Council: "Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation" (no: 16).

4. Insights leading to openness towards other religions

4.1 Universal Fatherhood

One of the basic thrusts of the Second Vatican Council was to think of what men have in common and how Church can promote fellowship among different nations of the world. Consequently, the Council fathers did not focus on the differences but on the similarities. This drive is not fully absent in LF. Pope refers to the patriarchal period in the Old Testament to remind us about the solidarity of the human race: "In presenting the story of the Patriarchs and the righteous men and women of the Old Testament, the *Letter to the Hebrews* highlights an essential aspect of their faith. That faith is not only presented as a journey but also as a process of building the preparing of a place in which human beings can dwell together with one another. ... Faith reveals just how firm the bonds between people can be when God is present in their midst" (no: 50). The inspiring element here is that the faith of the pre-Mosaic period, which was polytheistic, is indicated as a model to make our world a livable planet. To put it in other words, one may feel that the

document indirectly recognizes heterogeneity in the realm of religious beliefs.

Pope does not forget Abraham, the central figure of the patriarchal period. Abraham is presented as the father of the people of God: “God calls Abraham to go forth from his land and promises to make of him a great nation, a great people on whom the divine blessing rests (Gen 12, 1-3). As salvation history progresses, it becomes evident that God wants to make everyone share as brothers and sisters in that one blessing which attains its fullness in Jesus so that all may be one” (no: 54). The blessings God showered upon Abraham is the legacy of all those who have faith. The grandeur of Pope’s thinking consists in the fact that he sees faith not as a dividing factor but as a cementing force of mankind. The genuine faith can construct bonds between people because it proceeds from God and carries on God’s blessings to coming generations. Here again Pope does not introduce a new insight; he simply reiterates the teaching of *Nostra aetate*: “All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (Acts 17, 26) and also because all share in a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men” (no: 1).

4.2 Participatory mediation

The latest official teaching from Vatican on the issues related to the theology of religion is *Dominus Iesus*, the document published by the Congregation for Doctrine of Faith on 6th August 2000. Though it raised so many criticisms from the part of conservatives, I believe, it contains still inclusive viewpoints enough to uphold an open attitude towards other religious cultures. The LF talks about the Magi, who were led to Bethlehem by the star (Mt 2, 1-12). “For them God’s light appeared as a journey to be undertaken. And this journey will lead one to the confession that Jesus is the Saviour of the whole world. All God’s light is concentrated in him, in his luminous life which discloses the origin and the end of history” (no: 35).

The incident of Magi - finding out the way to Jerusalem through the science of stars – reveals the role the pagan religion can play in God’s plan of salvation. A genuine religious man, no matter the religion he belongs to, “can see signs of God in the daily experiences of life, in

the cycle of the seasons, in the fruitfulness of the earth and in the movement of the cosmos. God is light and he can be found also by those who seek him with a sincere heart" (no: 35). In this regard we can say that LF is not far from acknowledging the theory of participatory mediation proposed by the *Dominus Iesus*. According to DI, "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but rather gives rise to manifold cooperation which is but a participation in this one source" (DI no: 14). It means that God may make use of gods, scriptures and leaders in other religions to mediate grace to their respective followers, and this does not, in any way, go against Christ's uniqueness as the only saviour of the world.

4.3 'Me and Other', mirrors of God

Perhaps the most sublime contribution of LF to the theology of religion in the present context is, in my view, the following two sentences: a) "The more Christians immerse themselves in the circle of Christ's light, the more capable they become of understanding and accompanying the path of every man and woman towards God" (no: 35). Nowadays we come across several people in the Kerala Church who take extreme care to avoid mingling with the non-Christians. They withdraw from their genuine customs and traditions under the pretext that they might alienate them from the Christian belief. This is not however a healthy attitude; it derives from unnecessary fear and lack of sound theological convictions.

In fact the official teaching of the Church is just the opposite. The *Nostra aetate* advises: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which although differing in many ways from her teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture" (no: 2). My experience is that the more you appreciate God's presence in the authentic spiritual resources of non-Christians, the more you grow in the love of Jesus. When we discover the prominent features in other religions we understand better the universal fatherhood of God and the universal salvific mission of Christ. My joy finds no bounds when I realize that my

Jesus is not the Jesus of Christians alone; that He is more than a tribal God and that He cares everybody as his children. No doubt the above-mentioned sentence of LF is a push for those who meditate on the hidden ways in which God mediates to other believers the merit of his son's redemptive work.

b) "Faith teaches us to see that every man and woman represent a blessing for me, that the light of God's face shines on me through the faces of my brothers and sisters (no: 54). In the former sentence (the one I mentioned in section 4.3 [a]) the LF was insisting that commitment to Christ does not in any way hinder the faithful from appreciating the blessings in other religions. Here, compared to the first sentence, the document goes a step forward and affirms that the faces of co-believers are mirrors of God's face; they are inroads of God's light to Christians. To put it differently, Christians cannot abstain from cooperating with the believers in other religions because it is also through their religious riches that Christians will better understand the significance of revelation brought in Christ and his gospel. It is in this regard that *Nostra aetate* dictates: "Sacred Council begs Christian faithful to conduct themselves well among the Gentiles and if possible depend on them to be at peace with them and thus be true sons of Father who is in heaven" (no: 5).

5. Mission as Witness

We will conclude our reflections by examining LF's mission-outlook, which influences intensely Church's concrete stance towards other religions. Today, in the context of growing fanaticism among the Hindus and Muslims in India, a few Christians, especially those who are influenced by the Protestant model of preaching, feel the need for a militant form of evangelization. This not only betrays the concept of mission but also paves the way for communal conflicts in our country. See what LF says in this regard: "A common truth intimidates us, for we identify it with the intransigent demands of totalitarian systems. But if truth is a truth of love, if it is a truth disclosed in personal encounter with the Other and with others, then it can be set free from its enclosure in individuals and become part of the common good. As a truth of love, it is not one that can be imposed by force; it is not a truth that stifles the individual. Since it is born of love, it can penetrate to the heart, to the personal core of

each man and woman. Clearly, then, faith is not intransigent, but grows in respectful coexistence with others" (no: 34).

The stand of Pope is coherent with what the Council taught about the human dignity. *Dignitatis Humane* forbids any sort of force in the Christian praxis: "The truth must be sought respecting the human person and his social nature. Only then the research will be authentic and free. It is by the consciousness that man sees and recognizes the imperatives of the divine law. He has to follow faithfully its voice in order to reach God. Therefore he must not be under constraint to act against his conscience." (DH 3-4) *Redemptoris missio*, the Encyclical Letter published by Pope John Paul II in 1990 expresses the same: "On her part, the Church addresses people with full respect for their freedom. Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. The Church proposes; she imposes nothing. She respects the individuals and cultures, and she honours the sanctuary of conscience" (RM, 39).

The LF teaches us that one who is really taken up by the missionary zeal will not become aggressive; rather more humble and docile: "One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables us to witness and dialogue with all (no: 34). The missionaries cannot but be humble because ultimately it is not they but the Holy Spirit who leads the whole process of evangelization. They are merely instruments in the hands of the Spirit.

Hence the style of mission that LF advocates is that of witness. The example given is that of Pascal lamp: "The Christians are called to reflect that light to others as in the Easter liturgy the light of the Pascal candle lights countless other candles. Faith is passed on by contact from one person to another just as one candle is lighted from another" (no: 37). It is exactly what Benedict XVI taught in *Porta Fidei*: "Today what the world seeks for is the witnessing life of the faithful. Let their mind and heart be shined with the words of the Lord" (no: 15). Let us remember the words of St. James: "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (Jas 2, 17).

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